



# Looking towards India: Nativism and Orientalism in the Literature of Wales, 1300-1600

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**Looking towards India:  
Nativism and Orientalism in the Literature of Wales, 1300-1600**

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirement

for the degree of

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Abstract

After the conquest of 1282, Wales increasingly fell under the dominion of England and in 1535, the first Laws in Wales Act officially annexed the country. During this period of political and legal instability, Welsh men and women fought to regain independence, a struggle that led to the development of a nascent national identity. For many authors, this identity was fundamentally rooted in the topography of Wales and the mythical histories concerning the cultivation of its land. This interest in native *mirabilia* corresponded with a period of increased availability of English and continental geographical treatises and travelogues that provided Welsh authors with a new vocabulary for discussing wonder. Medieval and early modern Welsh authors incorporated these exotic geographies into their accounts of native landscapes in order to differentiate Wales from England and argue for a sense of Welsh cultural exceptionalism based in its alterity.

The strange and marvelous played an invaluable role in Welsh writing and English writing about Wales from late Middle Ages onward. While English authors employed orientalized and racialized rhetoric to justify the annexation of Wales under an English throne, Welsh authors availed themselves of the same imagery to establish Welsh political and cultural autonomy. In this dissertation, I trace the development of this phenomenon in the romance literature of the Middle Ages and analyze its influence on a wide variety of early modern genres, including historiography, drama, and poetry. I demonstrate the ways in which Tudor Welsh and English authors portrayed Wales as the source of historical, linguistic, and cultural marvel. By doing so, these authors argue for a Wales whose marvelous, and at times threatening, landscape separates it from England and, thus, protects it from English hegemony.

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*Er cof am fy nhad*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1604, a pamphlet appeared in the vibrant London book market that detailed the peculiar story of an event said to have occurred a year earlier in Pendine, a small town located in Carmarthenshire in southwestern Wales. The tale, purportedly narrated by a Welshman to his cousin in London, relates the sudden appearance of a mermaid in Carmarthen Bay to a local yeoman. The text also recounts the efforts of royal authorities to verify the wonder.<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet's Welsh author excitedly reports that he could not "omit this opportunitie, to gratifie your London Newes of joy, with a most rare and strange matter here in our confines." In the introductory paragraph, the author informs his cousin that although prodigious births and other such monsters commonly appear in London pamphlets, Englishmen should not underestimate the marvels that populate the rural western landscape, which he describes as "strange Beastes, taking of Whales and other strange fishes, fierie Dragons, 7 strange sightes in the Ayre, some by nature (others, as tokens of Gods powerfull Maiestie) all great and admyrable for men to wonder at." He proceeds to tell a story to rival the sensational accounts circulating throughout the London popular press. According to the author, a Pendine local named Thomas Raynold spied a strange fish, described as "a uery liuely Woman" from the waist up, and became enamored with the creature, spending "the better part of two howers uiewing of it." Deciding that he must find further witnesses to this remarkable event in order to preserve his reputation as a sane and honest man, Raynold returned to Pendine with his report of the mermaid, and soon the entire village migrated to the shore, wonderstruck by the fantastic beast. After the villagers watched the mermaid in awe for three hours, she disappeared from their sight. Rumors of the monster quickly spread to Carmarthen, and a court official named William Saunders was sent to examine Raynold and substantiate his claims. The author assures his relative that Raynold was found to be an entirely reliable source and that Saunders confirmed the existence of the mermaid of Pendine. By

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<sup>1</sup> NLW W.s. 1604(2). A digital facsimile of the document features in the National Library of Wales's Digital Mirror project and can be accessed through the library's website. See "Monstrous Fish," *National Library of Wales*, last modified 18 June 2007, <http://www.llgc.org.uk/index.php?id=monsterousfish>.

publishing this story in pamphlet form, the author wishes to remind his London-based cousin of the strange and beautiful natural curiosities he left behind in his native land as well as to demonstrate to English readers who have yet to travel west of the Severn the wonder that defines life in rural Wales.

On one hand, the story of the mermaid of Carmarthenshire belongs to the early modern phenomenon of cheap pamphlets meant to titillate their audiences with improbable tales of monstrous births, astrological oddities, and other prodigies.<sup>2</sup> These tales featured extraordinary figures of medieval legend and folklore that often strained the credulity of readers who had grown wary of the exaggerated stories defining the popular press.<sup>3</sup> The insistence of the author of the Welsh mermaid tale on the trustworthiness of Raynold's eye-witness account as well as the reputation of the independent examiners who came to Pendine suggests an awareness of the genre to which his story belongs and the likelihood of its being dismissed as yet another tall tale of supernatural excess. On its surface, the tale conforms to many of the generic expectations of pamphlet literature. The figure of the mermaid has a long history as a symbol of wonder in folklore and literature dating back to the Near Eastern nautical lore of antiquity;<sup>4</sup> in Britain, mermaids featured in Anglo-Latin and vernacular texts from the early Middle Ages onward.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The subjects of Tudor and Stuart pamphlets were wide-ranging, featuring political commentary and news about current events as often as prodigious births and monstrous fish. Despite this, the genre came to be known for its sensationalistic storytelling. Many pamphleteers, such as the Welsh author of the Pendine mermaid tract, were aware of the possible incredulity of their readers and exerted great effort to establish the credibility of their remarkable tales. See David Cressy, "Monstrous Births and Credible Reports: Portents, Texts, and Testimonies" in *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 29-50; and Joad Raymond, "'A Mongrel Race of Mercuries Lately Sprung Up': The Business of News, c.1580-1660" in *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108-22.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Walsham, "The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed," *The Historical Journal* 51.2 (2008): 518-20.

<sup>4</sup> Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh, *Sea Enchantress: The Tale of the Mermaid and her Kin* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 23-34.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-85 and 140-41. There is a direct line of continuity from the mermaids of the ancient Mediterranean to those found in medieval and early modern British texts via the transmission of classical texts such as Pliny's *Natural History* and the Alexander Romance. However, Benwell and Waugh rightly

During the early modern period, mermaids continued to hold a place in the cultural imagination: descriptions of mermaids appeared frequently in travel narratives, and their image was commonplace on maps of the era.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally, preserved bodies of alleged mermaids could be found in the *Wunderkammern* of wealthy collectors of *mirabilia*.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, this pamphlet conforms to depictions of Wales within the larger literary and cartographical culture of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Within the language of pamphlets, Wales was often depicted as the home to superstitious people who spoke a strange and backwards language.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary maps highlight the topographical and zoological wonders of the land, particularly the existence of mermaids and other sea monsters off its coast.<sup>9</sup> By writing to London of the strange creature in the bay and the awe it inspired in its Welsh audience, the pamphleteer employs both the lurid idiom of the popular press as well as ethnic stereotypes about the Welsh in order to create a story marketable to a London audience.

Yet a closer reading of the pamphlet complicates traditional narratives concerning the grotesqueness of Wales and the sophistication of London. Although the pamphlet's illustrations

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draw attention to domestic traditions of hybrid sea beings that feature in medieval British literature, such as Grendel's mother in *Beowulf* and Dylan of the *Mabinogi*, suggesting a parallel insular folkloric tradition at least partially independent from Greco-Roman sources. For a brief account of mermaids and other aquatic monsters in Welsh tradition, see Anne Ross, "Giants, Water Monsters, and Inhabitants of the Otherworld" in *Folklore of Wales* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), 95-104.

<sup>6</sup> For a study of the prevalence of mermaids in early modern English literature, see Tara Elizabeth Pedersen, *Confounding Categories of Knowledge: Mermaids in Early Modern English Theatrical Culture*, (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Davis, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> While mermaids were more rare than unicorn horns, griffin claws, and other fanciful relics found in the curiosity cabinets of the wealthy, they appeared with some regularity in more ornate collections. In their study of the naturalization of wonder from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment, Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park remark upon the work of the Italian physician Girolamo Cardano who, in response to the amount of illegitimate marvels on the *mirabilia* market, wrote a guide to verifying the authenticity of mermaid corpses, among other oddities (167). For an account of the nature of the objects in these collections, see Daston and Park, "The Property of Things," in *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 67-100. For an account of the history of mermaid hoaxes in Europe since the fifteenth century, see Jan Bondeson, "The Feejee Mermaid" in *The Feejee Mermaid and Other Essays in Unnatural History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 36-63, esp. 41-42 and 57-63.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond, 220-24.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see the maps in John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (London, 1610); and Michael Drayton, *Polyolbion* (London, 1612).

highlight the unsightliness of the mermaid, the author's written description of the creature obscures accepted definitions of beauty and monstrosity. For example, the woodcut illustration gracing its cover depicts the mermaid as a malformed fish with a human torso but a distinctly leonine face, more akin to the monsters of *mappae mundi* than a beguiling siren. The text of the pamphlet, on the other hand, portrays the mermaid in flattering terms, describing the beast as "faire" multiple times and emphasizing its ability to enchant the villagers with its beauty. Among the Welshmen, the mermaid elicits wonder rather than horror. The author does not mock the villagers for their superstition as the authors of other pamphlets might; instead, he insists that royal examiners confirmed the existence of the mermaid (and with it the credibility of the rural Welsh). The pamphlet validates Welsh belief in the supernatural qualities of the landscape and challenges London readers' assumptions regarding their western neighbors. Rather than condemning folk belief, the pamphlet celebrates the natural wonder found in the "the Westerne Mountaines of Wales." The pamphlet invokes common prejudices regarding the primitiveness and monstrosity of Wales only to reject them for a narrative that replaces revulsion with awe and defends the land as home to *mirabilia*.

The Pendine mermaid pamphlet represents a trend within Welsh literature that found vociferous support in the latter half of the sixteenth century among Welsh humanist and antiquarian circles. The authors associated with these circles often positioned their homeland as an inherently marvelous space whose political and cultural autonomy could be traced to its geographic and ethnographic alterity. Although this idea found its greatest expression in the numerous histories produced during the Tudor period, it had long been a part of Welsh intellectual heritage. The belief that Wales held great natural wonder dates to at least the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, whose final section cataloguing the marvels of Britain served as a blueprint for Welsh and English lists of native *mirabilia* throughout the medieval period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Morris, ed., "Historia Brittonum" in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore, 1980), 50-85.

Medieval prose tales incorporated these *mirabilia* into their own descriptions of Wales, merging them with aspects of orientalist literature popular at the time. In these tales, Wales serves as the epistemological equivalent to the Far East: native wonders often exist within the same space as the marvels of India and Africa borrowed from works such as the Letter of Prester John, *The Book of John Mandeville*, and the Alexander Romance.

The conflation of East and West in these tales is based on the theories of classical geography that emphasized the balance of the natural world.<sup>11</sup> If the treasures of India represented the inherent value of the world's eastern edge, it could be logically assumed that Wales, on the world's western border, shared many of the same marvelous attributes. Within the corpus of Middle Welsh literature exists a plethora of creatures drawn from native and orientalist traditions that transgress corporeal boundaries and whose existence calls into question standard divisions between human and animal. Populating the landscape of Wales in these tales are giants, black Cyclopes, magical fountains, and water monsters, among others. Like most other peoples in the Middle Ages, the Welsh thirsted for the wondrous and the strange. Where the Welsh response differed, however, was its placement of these strange and wondrous creatures firmly within the borders of Wales. As Wales was looking outwards to the East, it also followed its own gaze inward and back onto itself, creating a dual-consciousness that took on more political significance after the Edwardian conquest in 1282 as Wales progressively lost its autonomy and its territory shrunk. By defending the wonder of Wales, authors differentiated it from England and thus opposed its assimilation into a unified Anglo-British state. For them, Wales's extraordinary natural wonder demonstrated its cultural and political relevance in the face of hegemonic and homogenizing forces.

Although this tendency to valorize the marvelous in Welsh literature remained steady throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the sixteenth century the *mirabilia* tradition

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<sup>11</sup> John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 53-55.

found a renewed voice among the Welsh literary elite. Writing in Welsh, English, and Latin, scholars such as Humphrey Llwyd, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, David Powel, and many others devoted themselves to disseminating and defending Welsh pseudohistory through translations of medieval texts as well as their own historiographical compositions. These authors concerned themselves with the fantastic early history of the island (in particular the existence of giants in Britain), the aboriginal status of the Welsh, and importance of the Welsh language as a Trojan relic. Drawing upon the language of medieval Welsh *mirabilia*, they established Wales as source of geographical, historical, and cultural wonder.

There are several interconnected causes for the Tudor revival of medieval Welsh marvels. Medieval narratives experienced a vogue in sixteenth-century Britain, in particular narratives that could not only link the history of Wales to that of the Trojans, but also establish the continuity of such heritage through the reign of the Tudors. Both England and Wales saw an increased interest in medieval pseudohistory following the ascension of Henry VII in the late fifteenth century. Although primarily raised in France, Henry had emphasized his Welsh heritage as a member of the Anglesey Tudor dynasty during his campaign against Richard III. Drawing upon the prophecies of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* as well as the parallel Welsh bardic tradition of *brutiau* (Welsh prophetic poetry), Henry positioned himself as the long-awaited king destined to unite Britain under a single Welsh crown.<sup>12</sup> While the hope for the establishment of a Welsh monarchy soon faded, the subsequent attention it brought to medieval Welsh pseudohistory did not: the Tudor era produced a wide range of Galfridian *apologiae* from antiquarians like John Leland and John Prise, who fervently defended the historicity of figures such as King Arthur and Brutus of Troy.<sup>13</sup> Within Wales, the increased interest in Geoffrey's

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<sup>12</sup> Gruffydd Aled Williams, "The Bardic Road to Bosworth: a Welsh View of Henry Tudor," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1986): 7-31.

<sup>13</sup> John Leland, *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii regis Britanniae* (London, 1544); John Prise, *Historiae Britannicae Defensio* (London, 1553).

*Historia* led to a general medievalist revival that bred not only defenses of Galfridian history, but also treatises on native giant and topographical lore. At the same time, new translations of medieval English and continental texts began to appear; especially popular were tales of fantastic travel to the East and romances that contained orientalist elements.

This medievalist strain was not unique among the Welsh: the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed similar antiquarian movements within England.<sup>14</sup> Despite these comparable English currents, however, the Welsh medievalist impulse generally opposed insular historiographic trends. While this embrace of medieval historical narrative began with the propagandistic overtures of Henry VII towards Welsh tradition, it found its most ardent support thanks to the work of the historian Polydore Vergil, an Italian humanist commissioned by the Tudors to write a chronicle of England from the arrival of Julius Caesar until the early sixteenth century. This work, *Anglica Historia*, utilized new, continental modes of historiography that rejected the mythological and folkloric elements of medieval chronicles.<sup>15</sup> Vergil called into question much of the Welsh and Galfridian legends that Henry VII had promoted at the time of his ascension, notably the founding of Britain by Brutus and his fellow Trojan refugees and their battles with the indigenous giants of the island.<sup>16</sup> Although some, like Leland, rejected Virgil's

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<sup>14</sup> Certain strains of medievalist thought appear throughout much of the literary output of sixteenth-century England. Fantasies of medieval kingship inform many of Shakespeare's histories, which were in turn drawn from the medievalist chronicle of Raphael Holinshed. In works like *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser appropriated the language and imagery of Arthurian Romance to construct an imaginary space in which the boundaries between Tudor England and a medievalist Otherworld collide. However, despite the influence of early Tudor antiquarians like John Leland, English historiographical trends increasingly reflected the proto-empiricist philosophy of Polydore Vergil, who rejected the most fanciful elements of medieval history. By the early seventeenth century, even authors like William Warner and William Camden, who embraced many aspects of the Arthurian legend, were more critical of medieval narratives than their Welsh counterparts. See May McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Arthur B. Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity: Perceptions of Prehistory in Renaissance England* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993); John D. Cox, "The Politics of Stuart Medievalism," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 187-96; and Thomas A. Prendergast, "Spenser's Phantastic History, *The Ruines of Time*, and the Invention of Medievalism," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38.2 (2008): 175-96.

<sup>15</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia* (Basel, 1533).

<sup>16</sup> See Ferguson, "A Digression on Giants" in *Utter Antiquity*, 84-105.



dismissal of the more outlandish elements of traditional insular history, many English historians followed Virgil's lead, fashioning narratives that downplayed and in some cases openly repudiated medieval sources. Works such as William Camden's *Britannia* and Michael Drayton's *Polyolbion* demonstrated the way in which alternative histories could be established to minimize the influence of Welsh and Galfridian lore on the collective historical identity of Britain.<sup>17</sup> At the same time medieval chronicles were falling out of fashion in England, Welsh humanists and antiquarians found themselves defending the veracity of their native traditions in manuscript and in print.<sup>18</sup> John Prise's *Historiae Britannicae Defensio* directly addressed the anti-Galfridian bias of Vergil and his followers, while the histories of Humphrey Llwyd, David Powel, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, and Elis Gruffydd reinforced the value of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh *brut* tradition to the concept of Welsh nationhood and identity.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to Vergil, these authors often highlighted the more fantastical elements of this tradition as authentic history, suggesting that a historical concept of Britishness was marvelous, medieval and, most importantly, Welsh.

This defense of Welsh identity based in the wonders of the past was not only in response to the devaluing of medieval history among scholars and antiquarians, but also a reaction to the practical political assaults on Welsh culture that would define Anglo-Welsh relations until the twentieth century. Although English incursions into Wales had commenced centuries earlier, this period saw the most comprehensive erasure of Welsh political sovereignty. Under the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542, Wales became incorporated into England; the passage of these laws saw reductions in the status of Welsh language and customs in favor of England as the primary cultural force throughout a newly united Britain. The calls for the dissolution of a distinct

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<sup>17</sup> William Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1586); and Drayton, *ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> A.O.H. Jarman, "Y Ddadl Ynghylch Sieffre o Fynwy," *Llên Cymru* 2.1 (1952): 1-18; and Brynley Roberts, "Sieffre o Fynwy a Myth Hanes Cenedl y Cymry" in *Cof Cenedl* VI, Ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1991), 1-32.

<sup>19</sup> Ceri Davies, "Polidor Vergil, Syr John Prise ac Urddas y Cymry" in *Cof Cenedl* XX, Ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 2005), 61.

Welsh national identity grew stronger by the early years of the seventeenth century as James I's ascension to the throne and his subsequent unification efforts brought the island under a single ruler. During this period, the notion of a British identity shifted rapidly; no longer did it describe a specifically Welsh heritage derived from one's status as a descendant of the ancient Britons, but rather it expanded to include all inhabitants of an Anglocentric Britain.<sup>20</sup> Like the writings of Polydore Vergil and the historiographical debates they inspired, the annexation of Wales into England prompted impassioned support for an autonomous Welsh culture. For Welsh medieval apologists, the singularity of Wales was supported by a variety of means: language, legal tradition, and religious identity all played a role in the formation of sixteenth-century Welsh identity. Among these reasons features the belief in the uniqueness of Wales based in the marvels of its landscape and its people.

The increased Welsh interest in pseudohistory and landscape marvels throughout the Tudor era reinvigorated interest in travel narrative, both medieval and contemporary. This resulted in not only the transmission of *mirabilia* in contemporary histories and treatises, but also in the creation of new translations of medieval texts concerning the East. In translations of works such as *The Book of John Mandeville* and the Alexander Romance, early modern Welsh authors found parallels between India and Wales, viewing both as marginal landscapes concealing hidden treasures. As Britain increasingly expanded across the Atlantic, Welsh authors also looked westward for inspiration, establishing parallels between the wonders of the native landscape and those of the Americas. Within the sixteenth-century Welsh American tales, native geographical lore combined with imperialist narratives to create spaces that were at once utterly foreign and deeply Welsh. In these texts, medieval Welsh wonder survives in the uncanny and primitive landscapes of Florida, Mexico, and Patagonia. For example, authors such as Humphrey Llwyd,

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<sup>20</sup> Marisa Cull, "Contextualizing 1610: *Cymbeline*, *The Valiant Welshman*, and the Prince of Wales" in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly*, Eds. Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 127-42.

David Powel, and Siôn Dafydd Rhys promoted the legend of a twelfth-century Welsh prince named Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd, who was said to have sailed to Mexico where he established a Welsh colony whose ancestors lived on as the Aztec people.<sup>21</sup> Rhys, in particular, argues for an overarching medieval Welsh influence on the history of the Americas; in his lengthy treatise on Galfridian history, he suggests a genetic connection between the Welsh giants of lore and the Patagonian giants popular in contemporary Spanish literature. In these American tales, Wales is depicted as the source of newly discovered wonders: if marvels had flowed westward from India to Wales in the Middle Ages, the Age of Discovery would show a Welsh origin for the greatest New World marvels. Utilizing the language of medieval *mirabilia*, these sixteenth-century tales explore the effects of colonization and cultural absorption not only of the Native Americans, but also of the Welsh themselves.

This dissertation considers the complex relationship medieval and early modern Welsh writers had with the tradition of *mirabilia* and how this relationship informs Welsh identity during the Tudor period. Working within the framework of recent postcolonial studies on the composite nature of British identity, I examine Welsh language depictions of the wonders of Asia and America, depictions of native wonders, and the ways in which these two *mirabilia* traditions converge and inform each other between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. For the last several decades, fantastical Western representations of the East have been a source of interest for medievalists, who often focus on the manner in which Western authors fashioned India, North Africa, and the Middle East as a monstrous Other.<sup>22</sup> More recently have scholars begun to explore

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<sup>21</sup> Humphrey Llwyd and David Powel, *The Breviary of Britain with Selections from The History of Cambria*, Ed. Philip Schwyzer (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011); Siôn Dafydd Rhys, "Appendix: NLW Peniarth 118, fos. 803-837 (c. 1590)" in Chris Grooms, ed., *The Giants of Wales/Cewri Cymru* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 241-316.

<sup>22</sup> The effect of this trend on Medieval Studies has been widespread, and it would be impossible for this dissertation to provide a complete bibliography on this topic. Here I have listed just some of the particularly influential or illuminating works in the field: Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel, "Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies," *The American Historical Review* 103.3 (1998): 677-704; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds., *Postcolonial Approaches to the*

the relationship between ethnographical portraits of the Eastern edge of the known world and ethnographical portraits of its Western edge in the Middle Ages (i.e., Britain, Ireland, and Iceland). In particular, the works of Jeffrey Cohen, Kathy Lavezzo, and Michelle Warren have demonstrated the influence of this sense of geographical marginality on early English national identity.<sup>23</sup> Yet, despite Wales's geographic liminality as part of the "Celtic Fringe," little work has been done on this phenomenon in Welsh literature. Scholars such as A.D. Carr and Marged Haycock have laid the groundwork for understanding the Welsh tradition of *mirabilia* and travel literature, but their work emphasizes its correspondences within a larger European literary context.<sup>24</sup> Although their work touches upon the fetishization of Eastern landscapes in Welsh literature, it does not consider the way in which these foreign landscapes served as a model for the creation of a Welsh sense of alterity. Similarly, while scholars of Renaissance Britain have thoroughly explored the difficult position of Wales as an intimately foreign space in the sixteenth-century English imagination,<sup>25</sup> little has been written regarding Welsh authors' own complicity in establishing the Otherness of Wales for their own political and cultural ends.

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*European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003); Carolyn Bynum Walker, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102.1 (1997): 1-26; Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Sylvia Tomasch and Sean Gilles, *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and John Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); *ibid.*, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Michelle Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Marged Haycock, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 2007); and A.D. Carr, "Inside the tent looking out: the medieval Welsh world-view" in *From Medieval to Modern Wales*, Eds. R.R. Davies and Geraint Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 30-44.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer, eds., *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); David Baker and Willy Maley, eds., *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge,

In this dissertation, I will bridge some of the gaps in this scholarship as well as suggest new approaches to an often-overlooked corpus of texts. My approach is interdisciplinary and transhistorical, combining the methods and interests of several sub-disciplines of what can be termed as ‘British Studies’ in order to better understand both Welsh identity and British identity in the medieval and early modern periods. Throughout this work, I focus my attention on three primary concerns. First, I examine the relationship between the *mirabilia* of the Middle Ages and those of the Tudor Era and argue for a shared Welsh vocabulary of wonder that celebrates, rather than understates, Wales’s relationship with the distant corners of the world. Secondly, I consider how this language of wonder found new uses after the Acts of Union by Welsh antiquarians who wished to defend Wales, its history, language, and culture, from encroaching anglicization. Finally, I explore the cultural currency this language possessed during periods of British exploration and colonization, particularly in relation to Wales’s own status as an internal colony. By doing so, this dissertation presents an overview of the complicated relationship of Wales to the marvelous that should enhance our understanding of both Welsh and English literature.

Chapter One explores the medieval background of wondrous British landscapes and the monstrous creatures that inhabit them. I examine the means by which Middle Welsh prose tales incorporated elements of Eastern marvel into portrayals of the native landscape. In particular, I consider the importance of giants in the medieval Welsh mythopoetic imagination. I situate these giants within the context of Welsh discourses surrounding the nature of monstrosity and the role of the wondrous in the formation of a Cambro-British state. I argue that Welsh texts utilize and subvert medieval beliefs about the monstrous by emphasizing the humanity of giants and their importance in the establishment of an independent Wales.

Chapter Two analyzes the ways in which sixteenth-century Welsh humanists and antiquarians appealed to medieval understandings of the marvelous in order to argue for a sense

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Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Jerry Hunter, *Sofffestri'r Saeson: Hanesyddiaeth a Hunaniaeth yn Oes y Tuduriaid* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

of a unique Welsh national character in response to the increasing anglicization of Welsh public life. I examine the role that medieval giant lore played in Welsh responses to the union of Wales and England during a time when many English historians were rejecting traditional origin stories of the island. In the face of critics such as Polydore Vergil and William Camden, John Prise, Elis Gruffudd, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, and others produced new manuscript translations of medieval pseudo-histories that traced the ancestry of the Britons to prehistoric giants who shaped the landscape of Britain.

Chapter Three considers the concept of the Welsh as aboriginal people whose land functions as a prehistoric backdrop upon which the marvelous history of Britain was written. I demonstrate the symbolic force mountains and mountaineers held within the Welsh historical imagination. Sixteenth-century historical and grammatical treatises depict not only the landscape, but also the soundscape of Britain as marvels that connect Wales with an ancient past whose origins can be traced to the civilizations of the Near East, whether genetically through Trojan ancestry or linguistically through theories regarding the perceived connections between Welsh and Hebrew that were popularized during this time. Taken together, they establish Wales as a space topographically and linguistically foreign from England and thus resistant to absorption into the English body politic.

Chapter Four investigates the role marvelous American landscapes played in the creation of early modern Welsh identity. Just as tales of India had fascinated medieval Welsh authors, accounts of American colonization appealed to humanists, who translated and adapted English and Italian conquest narratives for a Welsh audience. Focusing on the treatment of the legend of the Welsh Indian prince Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd in sixteenth-century histories and travel narratives, I show how Welsh authors present the landscape of the New World as an intrinsically Welsh space where their own language and customs thrive. By doing so, I argue that they simultaneously align their own fate with the fate of the American indigenous population in their writings.

The tendency to identify with the marvelous on the world's eastern and western borders is evident in various Welsh translations of medieval travel narratives in the sixteenth century. Chapter Five provides a case study of two medieval texts that found a renewed popularity in Tudor Wales: *The Book of John Mandeville* and the Alexander Romance. Both texts are translated in ways that highlight the problematic nature of travel and conquest: they are adapted to garner sympathy for the peoples that the explorers subjugate. I interpret these adaptations within the framework of the Welsh humanist interest in medieval wonder-tales as well as the proclivity to associate Wales with exotic lands on the world's edge. By reframing the heroic travelers Alexander the Great and Mandeville as villainous, these Welsh translations complicate the ethics of travel during the Age of Exploration.

From the Pendine mermaid to the giants of Middle Welsh prose to the Welsh Indians of Renaissance histories, the worthiness of Wales has often been equated with its natural curiosities and its relationship to the marvelous. With this dissertation, I hope to offer a new perspective on literature familiar to anyone with an interest in medieval and early modern Wales as well as provide an introduction to a body of literature that remains underserved. While this work focuses primarily on the medieval origins of this relationship and the role it played within a specific cultural moment in Tudor Era Wales, it has implications for other genres and periods of Welsh literature in which Welsh Indians and wondrous fountains continued to hold sway in the literary imagination.

CHAPTER ONE  
BUILDING A WELSH VOCABULARY OF WONDER:  
THE ROLE OF *MIRABILIA* IN MEDIEVAL WELSH PROSE

Tales of the marvelous and outlandish profoundly influenced Latin and vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages. A survey of popular literature of the period reveals a preoccupation with the exotic and uncanny that supersedes national and cultural boundaries.<sup>1</sup> The medieval tradition is replete with cartological treatises, tales of Asian exploration, lapidaries, and bestiaries, all of which display a fascination with the fabulous and monstrous creatures that lurk outside the borders of a perceived Western European epicenter of culture and civilization. The corpus of medieval Welsh literature similarly contains tales of the strange and wonderful. Although medieval Welsh prose has come today to be understood primarily in terms of the native tales of the *Mabinogion*, manuscript evidence suggests that translations of popular European works, often adapted to suit Welsh sensibilities, found a larger audience among the Welsh intellectual elite.<sup>2</sup> Through these translations, Welsh readers could access the wonders of the East and expand their intellectual and imaginative horizons beyond their provincial borders.<sup>3</sup> This fact by itself is entirely unremarkable: the popularity of wonder-texts within the literary corpora of almost every Western medieval language speaks to their broad appeal throughout Europe. Unlike their European counterparts, however, Welsh authors and translators often paralleled the wondrous and monstrous landscapes found in these works to the marvels found within their own

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<sup>1</sup> For more on medieval travel literature and the tradition of the Wonders of the East, see Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, "The Topography of Wonder" in *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 21-66; Mary B. Campbell, "The Fabulous East: 'Wonder Books' and Grotesque Facts" in *The Witness and the Other World*, 47-86; and John Block Friedman, "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners" in *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 37-58.

<sup>2</sup> See Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "Crossing the Borders: Literary Borrowing in Medieval Wales and England" in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, Eds. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 159-73; A.D. Carr, "Inside the tent looking out," 30-44; Nesta Lloyd and Morfydd Owen, eds., *Drych yr Oesoedd Canol* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986); and Marged Haycock, "Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules: three early medieval poems from the Book of Taliesin," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 13 (1987): 7-38.

<sup>3</sup> Carr, 33.



homeland. The literature of medieval Wales presents a landscape in which native culture heroes sit comfortably alongside figures of orientalist fantasy. These opposing narrative strains often inform and influence each other in ways that obscure the difference between the landscapes of Wales and geographical legend. This dissolution of the boundaries between Wales and the East allows authors to emphasize Wales's cultural difference, which would serve as the basis of the campaign for its political sovereignty.

The marvelous and strange have long played a prominent role in the Welsh literary tradition, dating back to the *mirabilia* list attached to the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>4</sup> The influence of the *History Brittonum* extended well into the later Middle Ages and provided a template for the popular genre of triadic literature that enumerated the manifold natural wonders of Wales.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this native *mirabilia* tradition, a substantial corpus of learned Latin texts was available to the Welsh as early as the ninth century.<sup>6</sup> The influx of Latin learning in Wales increased greatly during the late medieval and Tudor periods when such texts were rendered into the vernacular and compiled into the great anthology manuscripts of the period. Through many of these texts, such as the geographic encyclopedia *Imago Mundi* (W. *Delw y Byd*) and the travelogue *Itinerarium fratris Odorici* (W. *Fford y Brawd Odrig*), Welsh authors would have gained access to descriptions of the exotic monsters of the Plinian and Alexandrian traditions, including giants.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Morris, ed., "De mirabilibus Britanniae" in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1980, 81-83.

<sup>5</sup> Brynley Roberts, "Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saints' Lives" in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, Eds. Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 73-96; and Rachel Bromwich, ed., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), liii-lvii.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Latin Learning in Dark Ages Wales: Some Prolegomena," *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies*, Eds. D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E.M. Jope (Oxford: D.E. Evans, 1986), 91-107.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Lewis, ed., *Delw y Byd* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1928); Stephen J. Williams, ed., *Fford y Brawd Odrig* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1929).

Even more influential was Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, of which approximately 60 Welsh-language manuscript witnesses (given the title *Brut y Brenhinedd*) survive.<sup>8</sup> Via the Galfridian tradition, stories of the monstrous founders of Britain, the giants of Albion, entered the Welsh historical imagination. This Latinate tradition supplemented an earlier native tradition that envisioned the prehistory of Britain as a space populated by giants whose societal functions ranged from warrior to knight to king. These competing origin stories came into close contact in Welsh translations of French and English romance, which provide a window into the dialogue that existed between the Welsh and foreign literary traditions. The treatment of giants in these translations offers a particularly invaluable glimpse into a uniquely Welsh approach to natural wonder. The giants of the medieval Welsh tradition are simultaneously the monsters of pre-history and the quasi-mythological ancestors of the Welsh people; they are at once a function of the British landscape and symbolic of Welsh connections to Near Eastern geographies.

The question remains as to why a medieval Welshman would have viewed himself and his landscape through the lens of the *mirabilia* tradition. According to Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's masterful study of the perception of wonder in premodern societies, the average medieval reader's approach to literary marvel was paradoxical.<sup>9</sup> On one hand, the grotesqueness of many of these wonders was meant to be morally repellent. Popular Christian allegorical interpretations of monstrous bodies and landscapes emphasized the abjectness of foreign lands and their peoples. On the other hand, wonders possessed the singular ability to attract and delight. By the late Middle Ages, certain travel narratives, notably *The Book of John Mandeville*, began to empathize with wondrous men and animals, perceiving them not as an aberration but rather as

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<sup>8</sup> See Brynley Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and *Brut y Brenhinedd*" in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 21-66.

evidence for the diversity of God's creation.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, biological heterogeneity reflected the multifaceted nature of the divine. The belief that the world's monsters could possess fundamentally human souls has potentially wide-reaching impact for the study of medieval Welsh literature. Medieval geographers viewed the world as concentrically circling out of an epicenter located in either Jerusalem or Rome. Both popular and learned tradition argued that the further one ventured from this center, the more variable and less ordered the landscapes, animals, and people to be found. In the pre-Columbian era, Wales was among the lands that comprised the northwestern edge of the known world. When Gerald of Wales claimed in his *Topographia Hibernica* that the Western edge of the world contained as many marvels as its Eastern edge, he was not speaking rhetorically.<sup>11</sup> Both the Far East and Wales existed on the peripheries of the known world, and as such they shared geological and ecological traits common to all fringe regions.<sup>12</sup> Wales was thus in a position to view itself as a land on the margins without viewing

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<sup>10</sup> The belief that outward monstrosity was indicative of inward iniquity remained common in theological and philosophical debates regarding monstrosity into the modern period. Daston and Park have shown that beginning with the Baconian reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these religious sentiments found a new audience among burgeoning scientific communities in England and France as bodily difference became the center of not only spiritual, but also medical pathology. However, this view did not go unchallenged in the medieval period, during which time an equally influential theological explanation based in the works of Augustine found an eager audience. This secondary strain of thought argued that physical difference reflected the diversity of nature, rather than the state of souls. This theory of monstrosity played an important role, for instance, in missionary efforts in South and East Asia during the later Middle Ages: if those who appeared monstrous had fundamentally good human souls, then they too had the ability to receive salvation. These theories likely exerted comparable influence on the medieval marketplace of ideas, despite their fundamental irreconcilability, and we should keep both perspectives in mind when we approach questions of wonder and monstrosity in the premodern period. See Daston and Park, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past & Present* 92 (1981): 20-54; Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102.1 (1997): 1-26; Robert Bartlett, "Dogs and Dog-heads: The Inhabitants of the World" in *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 71-110; and Friedman, 89-92.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O'Meara (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 31.

<sup>12</sup> For a useful parallel, see the treatment of Scandinavia in medieval geographical literature. Just as the British Isles and Iceland were considered the world's westernmost edge and India its easternmost, Scandinavia was considered the northernmost populated land and was therefore often associated with the monsters of the *mirabilia* tradition, in particular *cynocephali* (dog-headed men) and the giants Gog and Magog. Notably, in the early Welsh poem "Pa gur yv y porthaur?" ("Which man is the porter?"), found in the Black Book of Carmarthen (c. 1250), Arthur and his men battle *cynocephali* in the mountains of a

itself as marginal, adopting for itself the marvels of the East in a way that positioned it as a privileged center rather than an aberrant peripheral space.

Wales was not alone in defining itself through the terms of its geographic extremity. For example, Kathy Lavezzo has recently shown how English national identity developed partially from Britain's distance from a Roman center of religion and culture.<sup>13</sup> She argues that the educated medieval Englishman would have been acutely aware of the marginal position of his homeland; continental literature popular in England as well as visual art such as the *mappa mundi* at Hereford depicted Britain as standing at the world's perimeters where the monstrous races could be found. Yet, however close to these peripheral monsters these Englishmen may have thought themselves to be, they never conceptualized themselves or their land as somehow akin to these creatures. Although England stands at the threshold of geographic alterity, it is not itself divergent from European religious and legal standards; instead, it serves as the gatekeeper to a Romanized world, positioning itself as a rational outpost surrounded by the wonders of the Celtic West and the Scandinavian North. The literature of medieval Wales avails itself of much of the same imagery: in these texts, geographic marginalization speaks to cultural superiority. Unlike England, however, Wales is imagined not as a defense against encroaching monsters, but rather as their birthplace. Welsh authors of the period populated the stories of their homeland with fierce giants, supernatural topographical features, and other marvelous elements drawn from Eastern Romance and their own native narrative tradition. The Welsh *literati* subverted conventional depictions of exotic landscapes: rather than highlighting the grotesqueness of the periphery as did their contemporaries, these authors emphasized the similarities between the Far East and Wales in a way that familiarized alien landscapes while simultaneously aggrandizing native ones. By

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mythic North, a fact that Patrick Sims-Williams attributes to the substantial influence the Latin encyclopedic tradition and the popularity of the Plinian monstrous races in medieval Wales. Sims-Williams, "The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems" in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, 41-43.

<sup>13</sup> Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*.

confusing the divisions between East and West, they domesticated the fantastic and in turn validated Welsh claims of cultural exceptionalism.

This particular form of self-exoticization manifested itself in the later Middle Ages during periods characterized by increased conflict between Wales and its more powerful insular neighbors. Although the Anglo-Saxon literature had certainly articulated its own ethnocentric views of the Welsh,<sup>14</sup> it was not until the Anglo-Norman period that such portraits of the Welsh developed an overtly racialized tone. In Anglo-Norman texts such as Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* and Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium Cambriae* and *Descriptio Cambriae*, the rural Welshman is consistently portrayed in orientalized and bestial terms, particularly in comparison to his urbane neighbors. Even texts ostensibly laudatory of the Welsh, notably Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and its associated literature, romanticized the land as the home of dragons, giants, and other monsters of the ancient past rather than a modern center of politics and culture.<sup>15</sup> As Wales was progressively absorbed into an Anglocentric insular state, it paradoxically became Other. Rather than attempting to homogenize Welsh cultural difference, however, Welsh literary texts embraced this alterity, availing themselves of the same chauvinistic imagery found in English texts and transforming it into a badge of ethnic pride.

Homi Bhabha has remarked upon similar phenomena in other postcolonial societies, deeming the adoption of hegemonic behaviors acts of mimicry. He writes:

the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Ward-Perkins, "Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?" *The English Historical Review* 115 (2000): 513-33.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle Warren, "Making Contact: Postcolonial Perspectives through Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Historia regum Britanniae'," *Arthuriana* 8.4 (1998): 115-34.

<sup>16</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 85-92.

Although Bhabha notes the ambivalence surrounding postcolonial appropriation, he highlights the potential subversive elements of such acts. The incursion of hegemonic cultural standards can normalize the prejudices of the dominant culture and instill a dual consciousness among subaltern populations who assume the prejudiced beliefs and mores of the colonial elite. However, these acts do not wholly reify the culture of the ruling elite at the cost of native traditions and identity: the performative quality of such mimicry can expose the artificiality of colonial ideologies and practices. That is, by performing the language of the colonizer, the colonial mimic reveals the constructed nature of dominant power structures and calls into question their inherent worth.<sup>17</sup>

The Welsh promotion of certain monstrous and marvelous elements in the landscape and history of Britain seemingly correspond to this pattern. Even more so than the English tradition, Welsh literature populates the British landscape with awe-inspiring topographical *mirabilia* and strange beasts. Unlike their English counterparts, however, Welsh authors domesticate these wonders and endorse these curiosities as evidence of their own cultural importance. Whereas Hidgen, Gerald, and others rely on such narratives of the uncanny to denigrate the Welsh, Welsh authors employ them to validate notions of Welsh identity and defend it against encroaching hegemonic pressure.

This chapter will examine the development of Welsh *mirabilia*, particularly topographical lore and tales of the gigantic, within the context of wider medieval discourses on monstrosity as well as competing insular notions of history and identity in the later Middle Ages. The early literature of Wales affords a wealth of wonder-texts, any one of which could accurately illustrate this phenomenon. I will focus my attention on close readings of a series of texts that I

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<sup>17</sup> Bhabha's understanding of performativity draws heavily upon the works of Jacques Derrida, particularly his deconstruction of J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts. However, other theories of performativity prove themselves to be useful for my understanding of postcolonial mimicry, notably Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity. Butler explores the parodic and subversive potential of mimicry. Of drag and gender parody, she writes, "This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (138). Although medieval Welsh acts of reappropriation certainly lack the intentionality of drag, the latter can provide a useful model for understanding the former's subversive adoption of certain racialized themes. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

believe are particularly representative of medieval understandings of geographical and historical marvel. In doing so, I will demonstrate the ways by which Welsh authors reappropriated a racialized discourse based in geographic difference in order to fashion a unique Welsh language of wonder that prizes alterity as evidence of cultural exceptionalism. I will examine how authors and translators often evoked tales of the Far East in descriptions of Wales, familiarizing exotic landscapes as well as arguing for a Welsh sense of singularity based in its geological and cultural richness. This richness demarcates Wales from England and, in turn, argues for Welsh sovereignty based in its marvelous heritage.

### **WALES AS BARBAROUS OTHER IN THE INSULAR IMAGINATION**

This sense of exceptionalism directly challenges the prevailing attitudes concerning Welsh people and landscapes that were prevalent in English literary and historical texts throughout the Middle Ages. The Welsh have long been characterized as a British subaltern, and their language and landscape continually faced the threat of absorption into Anglo-British hegemonic social structures.<sup>18</sup> Part of this process necessitated the trivialization of Welsh history and culture, which often took the form of fetishizing Wales and their ancestors as barbarians in need of external governance. English political rhetoric positioned Wales as alien in its campaign to annex the land and place it under English rule; similarly, English texts often portrayed the physical landscape of Wales as a foreboding, wild space separate from a civilized England. This depiction of the wilds of Wales granted its English overlords the moral authority to use whatever means necessary to tame the landscape through construction of castles and the people through the enforcement of English law. In these works, pre-existing independent Welsh culture is entirely disregarded; instead, Wales is presented as a *terra vacua* filled only with mountains and forests

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<sup>18</sup> Simon Meecham-Jones, "Erasure of Wales in Medieval Culture" in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, Eds. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27-55.

that house primitive men.<sup>19</sup> This representation is complicated by the pseudohistorical traditions of Wales itself that envisioned its rugged landscape as home to a race of aboriginal giants. These native traditions merged with racialized English depictions of the Welsh throughout the Middle Ages, resulting in the perception of Wales as a site of both wonder and monstrosity, the birthplace of Britain and yet somehow removed from the course of its history. This characterization can be found within a broad range of texts and genres throughout the Anglo-Norman and Middle English corpora. In this section, I will examine a few paradigmatic examples within the genres of topography, history, and romance that position Wales as geographic and cultural Other.

#### “MEN IN ÞIS LOND BUP ANGRY”

The tension between the beauty of Wales and the dangers of its landscape permeates English geographical writing throughout the medieval period. Idyllic Welsh landscapes promise wonders and other natural treasures, yet the mountainous terrain is also said to house giants and other terrible beasts. Similarly, the Welsh people are either praised for their rejection of urbane immorality or depicted as primitive men who are undeserving or unaware of the geological richness that lies at their feet. For example, in John Trevisa’s contemporary Middle English verse translation of Ranulph Higden’s mid-fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*, the author’s unflattering description of Wales highlights this relationship between the land and its people, whom he describes as *wel dyuers fram Engeland* (l. 84).<sup>20</sup> Trevisa depicts Wales as an Edenic space of natural abundance:

Hyt ys fol of corn & of fruyte  
 And haþ greet plente ywys  
 Of flesch & of fysch,  
 Of <bes>tes ta<m>e & wylde,  
 Of hors, cheep, & oxen mylde,  
 Good lond for al seedes,  
 For corn, herb[es], <and grasse> þat <sprede>. (ll.36-42)

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 43-45.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Waldron, ed., “Trevisa’s Translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon*, Book I, Chapter 38, *De Wallia: An Edition*” in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, 99-135.



According to Trevisa, Wales is literally the land of *hony [and] mylk* (l.53). Besides its preternaturally abundant harvest, Wales is also commended for its numerous natural *mirabilia* that transform it into an enchanted space; these include fish that change their colors, birds that sing only for the rightful prince of the land, and graves that adapt to the size of the man who lies in them.<sup>21</sup> Trevisa does not relegate these marvels to a mythical past, but rather locates them in the geography of the contemporaneous Welsh landscape. The wonders of Wales can be found *yn West Wales at Kaerdyf* (l. 268), *at Penbrook* (l. 283), *at Nemyr in norþ Wales* (l. 297), *yn Ruthlond by Tegengil* (l. 389), and *in Mon þat hatte Angleseya* (l. 396), among others. Trevisa does not mythologize Wales as a homogenous imaginative space; instead, he represents Wales as a real, if wondrous, place whose marvels are concrete and attainable to the English traveler who might wish to view them for himself.

If the Welsh landscape contains untold natural riches waiting for the eager traveler, however, the *Polychronicon* suggests that the Welsh are particularly poor stewards of such treasures. As Trevisa praises the landscape for its awe-inspiring wonders, he simultaneously depicts its inhabitants as dirty, poor, and excessively violent. He remarks upon the insufficiency of Welsh clothing to protect the people from the elements (ll. 87-104), the lack of refinement in their food (ll. 127-136), their propensity for getting drunk and telling *meny lewed tale* (ll. 137-144), their general idleness (ll. 169-72), and the comical eagerness with which they promote their Trojan ancestry (ll. 187-88). He emphasizes the violent nature of the Welsh several times throughout the poem, claiming:

Whanne a seþ þat hyt ys to do,  
In fiztyng a wol be ago.  
Gildas seiþ a buþ variable

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<sup>21</sup> Many of these wonders have parallels in early modern Welsh *mirabilia* tracts, a fact that is indicative of the *Polychronicon*'s popularity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Wales. In particular, the sixteenth-century Welsh *mirabilia* tract in the hand of Gruffudd Hiraethog (Peniarth MS 163ii), commonly given the name *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys*, owes a great deal to Higden and Trevisa: many of its wonders and historical tales are directly adapted from the *Polychronicon*. Further discussion of this wonder tract, as well as its relationship to Higden's text, can be found in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

In pees, & noȝt stable. (ll. 111-14)

Later, he claims that *men in þis lond/ Buþ angry as in Irlond* (ll. 435-36), another land whose supposed natural wonders and uncivilized inhabitants served as justification for English expansionism during the Middle Ages. Throughout the text, the Welsh are dehumanized, guilty of possessing *bestial maners* (l. 199) that separate them from their English neighbors. In fact, Trevisa claims that the only cultured Welshmen are to be found in the hybridized Anglo-Welsh March; Marchers, he suggests, have been civilized by their physical proximity to the English border and, as a result, are have become *more Englysch þan Walsch kynde* (l. 210).<sup>22</sup> Trevisa's meaning is clear: juxtaposed against the marvelous landscape, the inadequacies of the Welsh are magnified. Only through the process of anglicization can they be transformed into proper custodians of the land.

This dismissal of native Welsh culture is not uncommon; similarly exoticized descriptions of Celtic Britain can be found throughout classical ethnography, dating back as far as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. The *Naturalis Historiae* of Pliny the Elder argued for the Persian origins of British druidic magic.<sup>23</sup> Decades earlier, Julius Caesar had remarked upon the savage blue warriors that he and his men encountered during their conquest of the island.<sup>24</sup> The view of the

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<sup>22</sup> An interesting parallel to this claim is the Middle English romance *Sir Cleges*, which takes place in Cardiff. In the tale, the overly generous Sir Cleges finds himself impoverished through excessive charity. His fortunes improve, however, when he finds a cherry tree growing in winter. He travels to the royal court with the gift of cherries, winning the king's favor and regaining his wealth. The romance is notable because although the text highlights the Welsh setting of the plot, mentioning the fact the story is occurring in Cardiff on numerous occasions, it does not contain the same kind of marvelous events and characters as other Welsh-based English romances. While the cherry tree blooming in winter evokes similar trees commonly found in lists of *mirabilia*, Sir Cleges and his wife view it as gift from God for their charity rather than a natural wonder. Although the stereotype of the spendthrift knight could be applied to Sir Cleges, the text rewards him for his generosity and his cleverness in winning the favor of the king. It is possible that despite the Welsh setting and characters, their proximity to the border anglicizes both the characters and the landscape to the point that their Welshness becomes unremarkable in the face of their Englishness. Compared to the various North Welsh settings that can be found in other English romances, the Cardiff of *Sir Cleges* is barely distinguishable from an English town. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historiae*, Book XXX, Ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Julius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, Book V, Ch. 14.

Welsh as cultural and geographic Other permeates not only much of English writing about Wales, but also that of Gerald of Wales, that elusive figure whose own ethnic identity remains a point of academic contention.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of Gerald's own personal identification as Welsh, English, Norman, or something in between, it is clear that his depiction of Wales relies heavily on the same tradition that would later influence the *Polychronicon*. Like Trevisa, Gerald often relies on stereotypes of the Welsh as a venal and violent people, inhabiting a land of wonder that they don't quite deserve. He describes the Welsh in animalistic terms, claiming "they resemble wolves and eagles, which live by plunder and are rarely satisfied."<sup>26</sup> Their avarice manifests itself in their lust for land ownership, the quest for which often leads to corruption, fratricide, and arson. Unlike Trevisa and other English writers, Gerald's characterization of the Welsh is complicated by the competing Norman and Welsh ethnic identities to which he lays claim. This tension results in a portrait of the Welsh more positive than that of his English peers: Gerald displays a remarkable amount of sympathy for his subject, yet he fetishizes their rural lifestyle as noble savagery. He explains (but does not excuse) what he views as the sins of the Welsh by describing the level of poverty they have had to endure. He presents the figure of the rustic Welshmen as a relic of a distant time living in an idyllic state:

You may never find anyone worse than a bad Welshman, but you will certainly never find anyone better than a good one. A happy and prosperous race indeed, a people blessed and blessed again, if only they had good prelates and pastors, and one single prince!<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Although Gerald referred to himself as Giraldus Cambrensis, there has been a recent push by historians and literary critics to refer him as Gerald de Barri, a name that physically locates him in South Wales while alluding to the Norman cultural milieu in which he lived. Much of the recent work on Gerald centers on the hybrid nature of his identity, with some scholars such as Kathy Lavezzo positioning Gerald as an English author based on his work in the expansionist campaign of Henry II. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "In the Borderlands: The Identities of Gerald of Wales" in *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain*, 77-108; and Lavezzo, "Gerald de Barri and the Geography of Ireland's Conquest" in *Angels on the Edge of the World*, 46-70.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 262.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

He lists several strengths he perceives the Welsh to possess, the most significant of which is that they are “fortified by nature.”<sup>28</sup> He exoticizes the Welsh people as part of the marvelous natural landscape. For example, Gerald remarks upon the large number of wild animals in Wales who live freely among the people without fear of being hunted.<sup>29</sup> The image of man and beast in harmony evokes a pleasantly Arcadian scene, but Gerald’s praise conceals a subtle threat to Welsh autonomy. He subtly likens the Welsh to wild animals, dehumanizing them as unthinking and bestial creatures. Although he calls upon the Welsh to defend their home, the feral nature he attributes to them suggests that they are incapable of self-governance. They are merely part of a living tableau of wonder that define their land. The conclusion that can be drawn from Gerald’s account mirrors that of Trevisa: the Welsh are as untamed as their mountainous homeland and can only progress through the civilizing influence of English culture.

This perceived connection between race and landscape finds its origins in classical theories of geography that argued for the influence of topography and climate on national character.<sup>30</sup> In particular, these theories were applied to Eastern lands by European thinkers who wished to explain traits as various as skin color and funereal customs through geographical difference. The influence of this tradition manifests itself clearly in Gerald’s work. In his description of Ireland, Gerald famously draws parallels between the wonders he experienced in the western borders of Britain with the wonders he has read about in the Far East. He states, “Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves, so the boundaries of the West are also made remarkable by their own wonders of nature.”<sup>31</sup> Many scholars have demonstrated how Gerald’s descriptions of Wales and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>30</sup> Friedman, 53-55.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, 31. As Barry Lewis has noted, the farther northwest from the English border that Gerald travels, the more grotesque his descriptions become (*Gwaith*

Ireland mirror travelogues and ethnographies of the East.<sup>32</sup> In particular, his portrayal of the Welsh and their land prefigures late medieval accounts such as the *The Book of John Mandeville* in the way it deftly defamiliarizes its subject while at the same time it emphasizes the shared humanity of both the English and the Other. Gerald's work is a template for later literature that equates the Welsh landscape with that of the fabled East in order to assert English authority over the land. Ultimately, Gerald's description of Wales represents the same impulse as Trevisa's: both authors highlight the strangeness of Wales, its land, language, and people, for their own political ends.

#### “DE FORZ GENZ FURENT VENUZ”

Wales has long been established as the British home of the wondrous and monstrous in the insular imagination. As early as Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*, popular histories of pre-Saxon Britain depicted the land as the birthplace of a race of indigenous giants eventually pushed into the mountains of Wales by successive waves of invasions.<sup>33</sup> In the earliest iterations of this legend, Britain was known as Terra Gigantum; its

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*Natur a Edmygaf: Afonydd, Llynnoedd a Ffynhonnau yn Llenyddiaeth Cymru yn yr Oesoedd Canol* [Aberystwyth: Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 2008], 10). Furthermore, it should be noted that while many of the wonders of Ireland and Wales that Gerald recounts are reminiscent of each other, Gerald is far less sympathetic to the Irish than he is the Welsh, describing the former as “secret and distant freaks.” Whereas his depiction of the Welsh people is often sympathetic to their plight, the same cannot be easily said of his view of the Irish. Notably, the wonders of Ireland are more monstrous and more clearly derived from ethnographic depictions of the East than the wonders of Wales.

<sup>32</sup> See Robert Bartlett, “Gerald's Ethnographic Achievement” in *Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 178-210; Patrick Gautier-Dalché, “Entre le folklore et la science: la légende des antipodes chez Giraud de Cambrie et Gervais de Tilbury” in *La Leyenda: Anthropologie, Histoire, Littérature*, Ed. Jean-Pierre Etievre (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1989), 103-14; Asa Simon Mittman, “The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the ‘Marvels of the West’” in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, Eds. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 97-112; and Catherine Rooney, “Gerald of Wales and the tradition of the wonders of the East,” *Quaestio Insularis* 4 (2003): 82-97.

<sup>33</sup> Foundational giants can be found throughout pre-Galfridian vernacular English and Welsh literature. Early Welsh literature in particular demonstrates a fascination with giants, and it is possible that Geoffrey drew some of his knowledge of the giants of early Britain from this tradition. Much of this literature cannot be dated securely to the pre-Norman era, and some of it appears reliant on Geoffrey's history. Although the relationship between Geoffrey and Welsh legend remains unclear, it is possible that Geoffrey was at least superficially familiar with native Welsh historical lore. For further discussion, see Brynley F. Roberts, “Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and *Brut y Brenhinedd*.”

giant namesakes ruled the island until the arrival of Brutus and his establishment of a new British hegemony displaced them. Both the English and Welsh embraced this narrative, and the popularity of the tale can be seen in the local legends that are still disseminated in parts of Britain. For example, Chris Grooms has shown the interrelationship between Galfridian history and Welsh onomastic folklore, a trend that persisted long into the early modern period as Welshmen and women continued to name their local topographic wonders after Galfridian giants.<sup>34</sup> The confluence of pseudohistorical giant tales and the Welsh etymological impulse resulted in the creation of a fabulous landscape in which many unique topographical features can be attributed to the work of giants.<sup>35</sup> The *Historia*, for example, transforms the figure of the giant into a relic of an ancient world where monsters and men vied for dominance for the fate of Britain, and fashions Wales into the refuge for these malformed men.

Although Geoffrey makes some distinction between the political divisions of England, Wales, and Scotland as they existed in his day, his history is firmly set within the space of an imaginary pre-Saxon Britain united under a single ruler. Despite its ostensibly mythological setting, however, the *Historia* clearly reveals Norman political concerns. Many have examined the way in which the *Historia* reflects the propagandistic rhetoric of Norman colonization circulating within both England and Wales during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Grooms, *The Giants of Wales*, li.

<sup>35</sup> The perceived Welshness of many of these places, located primarily along the River Wye, was unstable even by the time of Geoffrey's composition. Although cities such as Caerllion and Gloucester have deep resonance in Welsh literary and historical lore, throughout much of the Middle Ages they belonged to the hybrid geopolitical space of the Marches. While the former seems clearly Welsh and the latter clearly English to modern audiences, during the medieval period these lines were significantly blurred. The heterogeneous nature of this space should inform all readings of Marcher literature as well as both Welsh and English depictions of the March.

<sup>36</sup> This view challenges the earlier belief that Geoffrey's history revealed a level of knowledge of Welsh literature and history that could only have been expressed by a Welshman or, as J.S.P. Tatlock argued, a Breton. Michael Faletra's argument builds upon the work of earlier scholars such as Brynley Roberts and John Gillingham who have argued that the text's ambivalence toward the Welsh suggests Geoffrey's Norman roots. Faletra, "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 60-85; Tatlock, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's Motives for Writing His *Historia*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 79.4 (1938): 695-

Although the *Historia* relates the foundation of Britain by the Trojan ancestors of the Welsh and the subsequent succession of independent kings who ruled the land until the arrival of the English, it does so within the framework of typological history that positions each wave of colonizers as a reflection of the ones that came before it.<sup>37</sup> Just as the Britons subjugated the giants and the Saxons subjugated the British, the text excuses Norman subjugation of the English and Welsh as simply part of the succession of divinely ordained occupations that defined the course of British history during the early medieval period. As part of this effort, the *Historia* takes great care to depict the faults of the British-cum-Welsh, using the racialized imagery of the British giant to further justify Norman invasion.

Geoffrey's relationship to the Welsh and the pre-Saxon British landscape is marked by deep ambivalence throughout the text: he simultaneously champions the heroes of Welsh legend as he argues for the erasure of Welsh autonomy. Michelle Warren describes the schizophrenic quality of the *Historia* as "occupy[ing] a double-time between memory and amnesia: it remembers the imperial past of a colonized people who became the indigenous Other of later conquerors."<sup>38</sup> This ambiguity informs not only Geoffrey's depiction of the Welsh, but also of the race of giants from whom they seized the land. Consider Geoffrey's description of Britain during the time of giant occupation:

At the time the island of Britain was called Albion. It was uninhabited except for a few giants. It was, however, most attractive, because of the delightful situation of its various regions, its forests, and the great number of its rivers, which teemed with fish; and it filled Brutus and his comrades with a great desire to live there.

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703; Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh Historical Tradition," *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1976): 29-40; and Gillingham, "The Beginnings of English Imperialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5 (1992): 1-17. See also Martin Shichtman and Laurie Finke, "Profiting from the Past: History as Symbolic Capital in the *Historia regum Britanniae*," *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1993): 1-35; and Michelle Warren, "Making Contact."

<sup>37</sup> For a useful account of the prevalence of typological history in early medieval British literature, see Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Warren, *History on the Edge*, 31.

When they had explored the different districts, they drove the giants whom they had discovered into the caves in the mountains.<sup>39</sup>

In its natural state, Britain represents an “uninhabited” (*a nemine...inhabitabatur*) idyll whose topographical wonders are tended by equally marvelous men. On one hand, the beauty of the landscape contrasts with the monstrosity of its inhabitants; on the other, the giants function as an innate part of the landscape. The landscape and its populace are equally uncultivated, and the arrival of the Trojan Britons is framed as imposing classical order on the appealing, yet unruly land. The British conquest provides a blueprint for the subsequent conquest of the Welsh, who like their giant predecessors become synonymous with the untamed landscape: the giants’ flight into the mountains and caves of Britain (*gigantes ad cauernas montium fugant*) at the hands of Brutus and his men mirrors the same flight the British would later make into Wales after their defeat by Hengist and Horsa. This exile is treated sympathetically by historians as wide-ranging as Gildas, Bede, Wulfstan, and Geoffrey himself; yet however sympathetically presented, the flights of both the giants and the Welsh underscore their rejection from Anglo-Norman society.

The *Historia*’s ambivalence concerning the nature of the relationship between the giants and the Welsh was developed further by the *brut* histories that followed and expanded upon Geoffrey’s narrative. In particular, the popular fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman curiosity *Des Grantz Geanz* examines the problematic origins of the giants of Britain.<sup>40</sup> The tale, which was translated into Latin as *De Origine Gigantum* (“On the Origin of Giants”) and assimilated into the late medieval chronicle tradition by the late fourteenth century,<sup>41</sup> takes the above-quoted excerpt from Geoffrey’s *Historia* as its inspiration as it imagines the land of Britain before the arrival of Brutus. The tale presents a history in which the island was originally populated by the exiled

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<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 72.

<sup>40</sup> Lesley Johnson, “Return to Albion,” *Arthurian Literature* 13 (1995): 24.

<sup>41</sup> James P. Carley and Julia Crick, “Constructing Albion’s Past: An Annotated Edition of *De Origine Gigantum*,” *Arthurian Literature* 13 (1995): 61-70.



daughters of an Eastern king who discover the island after being set adrift on the sea in a rudderless boat as punishment for a failed plot to murder their husbands. Led by the eldest sister Albina, they settle the naturally rich but desolate land. Soon, they are raped by a race of incubi, and this union produces the giants of Britain, who rule the island until the arrival of Brutus. *Des Grantz Geanz* carefully subverts Geoffrey's narrative of conquest. The tale presents a funhouse mirror version of the Trojan settlement of Britain.<sup>42</sup> Robert Warm has argued that giants in the *brut* tradition often serve as reflections of their heroic counterparts; he describes these giants not as "an unknowable and alien 'other'," but rather as "a hideously negative reflection of his [i.e. Brutus's] own imperial aspirations."<sup>43</sup> Whereas Brutus subdues the land and produces a race of kings and heroes, Albina embraces its wilderness and births a race of monsters.<sup>44</sup>

The text leaves little doubt of the monstrosity of Albina and her progeny. In both the Anglo-Norman and Latin versions of the tale, Albina and her sisters are unambiguously condemned as monstrous for refusing to bend to their husbands' will. Their desire for marital autonomy is described as *leur orgueil demaine* ("their personal pride") (l. 36),<sup>45</sup> which the Latin explicitly genders as *quadam uice feminae* ("a certain feminine plight") (l. 14).<sup>46</sup> While the text

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<sup>42</sup> Besides inverting the narrative of the *adventus Bruti* as it appears in Geoffrey, *Des Grantz Geanz* can also be read as revising certain aspects of *The Aeneid*, as Lesley Johnson has suggested. She states: "The events of Albion's foundation and demise could be seen as a curious replay of the antagonism between the Trojans and the Greeks at Troy. On Western soil this time, on the island of Albion, a monstrous and feminized order of the Greeks is defeated by the forces of Trojan masculinity" (p. 26).

<sup>43</sup> Warm, "Arthur and the Giant of Mont St. Michel: The Politics of Empire Building in the Late Middle Ages," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 41 (1997): 59.

<sup>44</sup> The parallels between the hypermasculine Brutus and the grotesquely feminine Albina have led some scholars to read as a statement on the limits of female autonomy and authority. In particular, Jeffrey Cohen has described the physicality of Albina and her sisters as "a misogynistic incorporation of disordered Nature, of the way in which the material world reproduces itself outside of human intention or control" (*Of Giants*, 49). For Cohen, Albion represents a female-oriented wasteland that left untamed turns monstrous, while Britain symbolizes a properly ordered, masculine space.

<sup>45</sup> For facing page editions of *Des Grantz Geanz* and *De Origine Gigantum*, see Carley and Crick, 92-114.

<sup>46</sup> For a translation of *De Origine Gigantum*, see Ruth Evans, "Gigantic Origins: An Annotated Translation of *De Origine Gigantum*" in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, Ed. James P. Carley (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 419-34.

describes the encounter between the sisters and the incubi as rape, it also suggests that the women's gluttony and lust leads them to welcome their attackers:

*Kant char et saunc perneient,  
Gros et gras devenoient.  
La chaline de nature  
Les surmont a desmesure  
Par desir de lecherie  
De aver humaine compaignie—  
De ceo sont sovent tempez*

When they had partaken of flesh and blood,/ they became big and fat./ Their natural lust/ overcame them to a great degree,/ because of a desire for debauchery/ in order to have human company—/ because of this they were often tempted. (ll. 399-405)

Their corpulence and physicality mark them as receptive to sexual relations with demons and later position them to be the mothers of giants. Although the tale begins by describing them as beautiful queens, by the end of the text the narrator alludes to the sisters' own possibly monstrous origins. Explaining the hideousness of the giant's appearance, the narrator claims: *Et les meres dont furent nez/ Furent grantz et mult corsuz,/ De forz genz furent venuz* ("And the mothers from whom they were born/ were large and quite gigantic/ because they came from a fierce race") (ll. 460-62).<sup>47</sup>

The Albina legend problematizes the early British foundation legend: *Des Granz Geanz* argues for Britain's monstrous and feminine origins while at the same time reassuring its readers that neither Albina nor her sons belong within the confines of civilized English society. The

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<sup>47</sup> Despite this monstrous portrayal, *Des Grantz Geanz* is notable for its complicated depiction of the sisters and their giant offspring that highlights their suitability for rule alongside their hideousness. For example, in the above quote, the race from which the sisters derive their lineage is tellingly described as *forz* (M.Fr. *fort*), which the Anglo-Norman Dictionary defines as 'fierce,' but also 'strong,' 'valiant,' and 'competent.' Similarly, Ruth Evans has called attention to the texts play on the giants' descriptor *grantz*, noting that it can mean 'distinguished' and 'powerful' as well as the more usual 'large' (423). Lesley Johnson has argued that rather than denouncing the concept of a female-oriented originary story, the text instead highlights the role women can play in the creation of history and the social order. As James Carley and Julia Crick have noted, the text gained popularity during a period of heightened Anglo-Scottish tension during which Edward I claimed dominion over Scotland. They suggest that the origin legend of Albina found an audience in those eager to provide an English counterpart to the Scottish origin story of Scota, another founding mother. Albina's potential use in Edward's anti-Scottish propaganda campaign indicates that the concept of a female founder, even one with monstrous ties, was perhaps not as problematic as has been claimed. See Evans, "Gigantic Origins"; Johnson, "Return to Albion," 30-31; and Carley and Crick, 55-69.

giants are exiled to the western mountains of Wales, a land historically depicted as a sanctuary for wild men. Within the *brut* tradition, the Galfridian giants mirror the savage Welshmen of insular ethnography who had likewise been forced into mountain caves.<sup>48</sup> While Geoffrey presents a unified, mythologized Britain relatively free of regional or national identities, later *brut* histories take care to delineate England from its Welsh neighbors. In this tradition, England is symbolized by the Arthurian courts while Wales houses the frightful men and beasts Arthur's knights must battle. For example, Layamon depicts Wales as a land separate from England in which dragons could be found and Uther Pendragon could escape into a wondrous forest. Although Layamon's complicated sympathies towards the Welsh have been well noted,<sup>49</sup> his portrait of Wales as a unique entity distinct from an anglicized Britain had a significant influence on the course of early British historical writing in late medieval England. The division of Wales and England in the English Arthurian tradition was so complete that by the mid-fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory could describe Arthur as "king of all of England" who fought the uprisings of the Welsh.<sup>50</sup>

Wales's perceived divergence from English cultural norms manifests itself in later medieval literature, particularly in its role as the home of giants. By the fourteenth century, *brut* giants who once were said to live in a geographically ambiguous Britain begin to be located specifically within the Welsh landscape. In Middle English romance, Wales functions as an enchanted space whose wonders threaten the stability of the civilized English landscape. For example, the fourteenth-century alliterative romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* speaks to the dangers of Wales during a period of insular political and military strife that preceded the

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<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *Of Giants*, 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see Daniel Donoghue, "Layamon's Ambivalence," *Speculum* 65.3 (1990): 537-63; and Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley, "'Going Native': Anthropological Layman," *Arthuriana* 10.2 (2000): 5-26.

<sup>50</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Ed. Stephen Shepherd (New York: Norton, 2004). Of course, this is not to say that Layamon's work directly influenced Malory's portrayal of Wales. Certainly, historical factors such as the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century conflicts between England and Wales, particularly the Glyndŵr revolt, would have contributed the perception of Wales as a potential source of uprisings. However, we should not understate the literary roots of this perception, which can be traced back to Layamon and other English and Anglo-Norman literature immediately following the Norman Conquest.

Glyndŵr rebellion of the early fifteenth century.<sup>51</sup> As Gawain travels through North Wales, he imposes civil order on an otherwise chaotic land embodied by the marvelous Green Knight.<sup>52</sup> Several postcolonial scholars have remarked upon the ways in which Gawain (in the poem an English knight) colonizes the Welsh landscape on his quest to behead the Green Knight.<sup>53</sup> Patricia Claire Ingham has argued that the text represents Wales as a fundamentally foreign landscape: “Dragons, trolls, and giants walk these woods...the scene foregrounds not Gawain’s strangeness, but the otherness of Wales to Arthur’s knight. Gawain represents his king in a wild place.”<sup>54</sup> Lynn Archer suggests that the poem is “thoroughly tied to England’s colonial project,” demonstrating the insurmountable differences between the wild Welsh and the civilized English.<sup>55</sup> When these opposing societies come into contact, it results not in the development of an organically hybrid society, but in the erasure of an independent Welsh culture. In this text, the ideal Wales is a virtual *terra vacua* to be conquered and populated by agents of the English crown. The foreboding and untamed nature of the land is personified in the body of the Green Knight, a

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<sup>51</sup> The portrayal of Wales in English romance remains an understudied topic of inquiry. Wales is specifically mentioned in only a handful of romances, and thus far, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has received the most critical attention. The presence of Welsh characters is even more rare. The romances that depict Welsh characters do not necessarily treat their nationality as fundamental to the plot. The main exception is the English translation of Chrétien de Troyes’s romance, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the Welsh version of which I discuss in more detail in this chapter. However, as Tony Davenport reminds us, further attention should be paid to the brief episodes that occur in Wales in order to gain a better understanding of the role of Wales in the Middle English literary imagination. See Davenport, “Wales and Welshness in Middle English Romances” in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, 144-49.

<sup>52</sup> For an edition of the text, see William Vantuono, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Rev. Ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Clare Ingham, “‘In Contrayez Straunge’: Sovereign Rivals, Fantasies of Gender, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” in *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 107-36; Lynn Arner, “The Ends of Enchantment: Colonialism and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48.2 (2006): 70-101; and Cory James Rushton, “Malory’s Divided Wales” in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, 175-190. For further discussion of the English depiction of Wales as exotic wasteland, in particular the Welsh responses to such a representation, see Susan Aronstein, “Becoming Welsh: counter-colonialism and the negotiation of native identity in *Peredur fab Efwrc*,” *Exemplaria* 17.1 (2005): 144-149.

<sup>54</sup> Ingham, 117.

<sup>55</sup> Arner, 79.

figure who is both recognizably human and dangerously supernatural, akin to the English yet at the same time almost exclusively defined by his alterity.

Similarly, the Anglo-Norman romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* depicts the mountains of Wales as a source of the monstrous.<sup>56</sup> Although the content of the tale is drawn from contemporaneous history rather than the *brut* tradition, the author appears well aware of Geoffrey's history and incorporates elements of its style into his narrative.<sup>57</sup> The tale is epic in scope, spanning from the first Norman incursions into Wales led by William the Conqueror to the uprising of the titular hero as he seeks to reclaim his rightful land in the Marches. One episode in particular speaks to the exoticization of Wales in the romance. Early in the narrative, William and his cousin Payn Peverel visit Castle Bran in North Wales, a location whose name evokes that of Bendigeidfran, the giant king of Welsh legend. They learn that this castle was the site where Corineus slew the giant Gogmagog. Curious, a small group led by Payn venture inside. Here they find a demon whom Payn must wrestle to the ground; once vanquished, the demon reveals to Payn that he is the spirit of Gogmagog. He then cedes his castle and his land to his fellow combatant. The tale clearly reenacts Geoffrey's account of Brutus's coming to Britain: Payn, whose battle with the demon duplicates that of Corineus and Gogmagog, wins land and authority for his kinsman William, who is positioned as the new Brutus.<sup>58</sup>

By reimagining the *adventus Bruti* as William's journey into a strange and dangerous Welsh landscape, the text justifies Norman control over Wales as Geoffrey had a century prior. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan suggests that the romance, being a product of Marcher literary culture, generally presents a more nuanced and realistic view of the Welsh landscape than many

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas E. Kelly, trans., "Fouke le Fitz Waryn" in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Eds. Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Timothy Jones, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, and National Mythology," *Studies in Philology* 91.3 (1994): 233-49.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

contemporary romances;<sup>59</sup> I, however, would argue that this early scene positions Wales as a site of monstrosity and instability. *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* firmly locates Gogmagog's home in North Wales in a castle whose name is reminiscent of one of the most memorable heroes of Welsh legend. Gogmagog not only reigns over the Welsh highlands, but he also fashions his home as a haven for other giants and demons against the intrusion of English forces. Thus, Wales becomes not the historical home of heroes but rather the last refuge of aboriginal giants of the race of Albina. *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* joins Geoffrey's *Historia*, *Des Grantz Geanz*, Layamon, and other Anglo-Norman and English historical accounts of the twelfth and thirteen centuries in expressing a deeply ambivalent view towards the giants of British history and the landscape in which they can be found.

#### ONCE IN CAER SE: NATURALIZING THE WONDERS OF WALES

Within the English literary tradition, the location of marvels in Wales ultimately serves as part of a larger colonizing project in which Wales was defamiliarized in order to disenfranchise its people and justify their forced assimilation into the English body politic.<sup>60</sup> These marvels are depicted as aberrations on a homogenous Anglocentric landscape. Welsh texts, however, domesticate these same *mirabilia*, deeming them an innate feature of Britain and proof of its exceptional nature. In particular, the figure of the giant demonstrates the extent to which marvels were incorporated into the symbolic language of Welsh national identity. Welsh native tales depict Britain as a society in which giants participate fully, taking on a broad spectrum of acceptable roles, including father, lord, farmer, and even king of the Island of Britain. These tales

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<sup>59</sup> Lloyd-Morgan, "Crossing the Borders," 167.

<sup>60</sup> The works of R.R. Davis have illuminated the process in which Wales was transformed into a proto-colonial state in the late Middle Ages. He has termed the Edwardian Conquest of Wales "the First English Empire," suggesting that the occupation of Wales provided the template for England's later colonization of lands throughout the globe. See Davis, "Colonial Wales," *Past and Present* 65 (1974): 3-23; and Davis, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093-1343* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

provide an alternative history to the predominant medieval narratives that associate giants with moral decay and barbarity.<sup>61</sup>

Traditionally, medieval literatures depict giants as antithetical to the heroic ethos. In the English Albina legend, for example, the giants of Britain are positioned as the antithesis to the noble Trojans. In the same manner, figures such as Gogmagog in *Fouke le Fitzwaryn* or the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain* are caricatures of their knightly opponents. These texts dehumanize the giants, presenting them as violent forces of nature. By establishing pre-Saxon Celtic Britain as home to giants, they implicitly exclude Wales from the course of British heroic history. Contemporaneous Welsh tales similarly depict Welsh geography in terms of the strange and the marvelous. Unlike their English counterparts, however, the authors of these texts fashion their mountainous native landscape as the wondrous home to a race of decidedly more complex giants. They portray giants not merely as monsters, but rather as morally ambiguous men who lived among the Britons and shaped the island's history and topography. Welsh authors problematize these monstrous origins, transforming giants into more sympathetic, if not always entirely developed, characters in their own right. These texts complicate insular narratives of Welsh alterity: rather than negating the racialized claims of Anglo-Norman and English authors, Welsh literature of the period celebrates the land's most fantastic elements as symbols of Wales's noble heritage and the diversity of its extraordinary natural wealth.

#### THE GIANT LANDSCAPE OF *CULHWCH AC OLWEN*

The Arthurian tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* perhaps best exemplifies native Welsh giant lore. Although its earliest extant manuscript witness does not appear until the fourteenth-century White Book of Hergest, certain elements of the narrative indicate that it may have developed

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<sup>61</sup> Although the majority of the Welsh native prose tradition likely predates many of the aforementioned English texts, they exist in dialogue with each other. Both traditions had access to many of the same Latinate and folk sources concerning giants, in particular biblical and geographical texts. For more on the close relationship and wide dissemination of these genres during the Middle Ages, see "Cain's Kin" in Friedman, 87-107.

independently of the Galfridian tradition. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans suggest that the original composition of *Culhwch* dates to circa 1100, but they trace the origin of some of the tale's episodes to the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of the tale's antiquity, however, its relationship to international literature concerning giants cannot be disregarded. While the tale betrays scant evidence of the influence of continental Arthurian lore, both of *Culhwch*'s extant medieval redactions reveal their provenance to be a post-Norman Welsh milieu.<sup>63</sup> For example, in both the White Book and Red Book texts, William the Conqueror appears in the lengthy court list as a member of Arthur's retinue. Although the tale's origins may predate the Anglo-Norman colonization of Wales, its extant versions do not. Certainly, its written transmission is concurrent with many English texts that depict the Welsh landscape and people in negatively racialized terms. Despite the questions surrounding the dating of the text, however, its archaisms provide readers with a tantalizing glimpse into the role of marvel in the early Welsh mythopoetic imagination. It presents Britain, and thus Wales, as a land replete with giants, each one of whom fulfills an invaluable role in creating and maintaining the order of Arthur's court.<sup>64</sup>

The giants of *Culhwch* cannot easily be classified: they range from grotesque characters similar to those found in classical geography to *sui generis* creatures whose virtues mask their monstrous heritage. The figure of Ysbaddaden Bencawr most closely resembles the menacing giants from other medieval literatures. As his name suggests, he is chief of the giants (*pen cawr*) of Britain and provides the primary source of conflict for Arthur and his men in the tale: in order to prevent the young knight from producing an heir and attaining his patrimony, Culhwch's

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<sup>62</sup> Bromwich, and Evans, eds., *Culhwch and Olwen: A Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), lxxxviii. See also Roberts, "Culhwch ac Olwen, the Triads, Saints' Lives," 73.

<sup>63</sup> Simon Rodway has challenged Bromwich and Evans's dating of the tale. He argues for a *terminus post quem* of the mid-twelfth century, although he suggests that *Culhwch*'s composition could date as late as the early fourteenth century. The references to the Norman world certainly indicate a later date than Bromwich and Evans's *terminus ante quem* of 1100. Simon Rodway, "The date and authorship of Culhwch ac Olwen: a reassessment," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 49 (2005): 21-44.



jealous stepmother places a curse on him so that he may only sleep with Olwen, the daughter of Ysbaddaden. This curse severely limits Culhwch's chances for procreation, as he must first win the maiden from her gruesome father. Although his stepmother reveals very little about the giant, Culhwch learns from his father that Ysbaddaden poses a serious threat that only his cousin King Arthur can overcome. Culhwch journeys to Arthur's court in Celli Wig and petitions the king to join him in battle against the giant. After Culhwch and Arthur assemble a retinue, they travel to the court of Ysbaddaden where Culhwch meets Olwen and falls immediately in love with her. She warns him of her father's cruelty and instructs the young knight that he must fulfill the giant's demands before he will consent to their marriage. Culhwch and Arthur meet Ysbaddaden in his court where he recites an absurdly long list of wonders the knights must collect before he will give Olwen in marriage. This task sends the men in search of British *mirabilia*, which will adorn the wedding feast of Culhwch and Olwen.

His tyrannical disposition and unreasonable demands clearly expose Ysbaddaden's wicked nature. Although the text doesn't provide a physical description of the giant, indirect references to his appearance suggest that he resembles traditional images of the gigantic and barbaric common in insular traditions. His most prominent features are his heavy eyelids that must be held up with pitchforks. They denote his large size as well as imbue him with a sense of otherworldly monstrosity.<sup>65</sup> His behavior is also consistent with the violent and animalistic impulses of other giants of medieval narrative: when confronted by the Arthurian retinue, he throws his primitive stone weapons at them and curses Culhwch's name. Due to Ysbaddaden's coarseness and brutality, Stephen Knight has argued that the giant embodies the Welsh landscape, whose rocky terrain was resistant to cultivation.<sup>66</sup> His association with the dangerous, yet

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<sup>65</sup> Compare Ysbaddaden to the figure of Balor in the Irish *Cath Maige Tuired* ("Battle of Magh Tuiredh"), king of the giant Fomorians whose eyelid is so heavy that it takes four men to lift it during battle. Elizabeth Gray, ed., *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Dublin: Irish Text Society, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Knight, "'Chief of the princes of this island': the early British Arthurian legend" in *Arthurian Literature and Society* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1983), 19.

marvelous landscape of Britain further establishes his connection to an untamed natural world.<sup>67</sup> The strange and threatening landscape over which Ysbaddaden rules reflect his own alterity. He oversees various races of giant beasts, the necromantic birds of Rhiannon, and the oldest animals of Britain who cryptically speak of the cyclical nature of human progress and deterioration.<sup>68</sup> The many wonders he asks Culhwch and Arthur to retrieve include witches' blood, the comb of the ferocious boar Twrch Trwyth, and the sword of his giant rival, Wnach Gawr. The world of Ysbaddaden serves as an uncanny parallel to the court of Arthur and its code a pastiche of knightly ethos.

Paradoxically, however, the parodic qualities of Ysbaddaden's brutality are what confuse the divisions between heroic and monstrous in *Culhwch*. Throughout the text, Ysbaddaden acts as mirror on the most extreme elements of Arthurian society. Sarah Sheehan has argued that the giant's violence and cruelty throughout the tale "complicates a reading of heroic masculinity as entirely positive or distinct from the masculinity of giants and boars."<sup>69</sup> He functions within the world of the text because of, not despite, his ferocity. For example, his attacks on Culhwch occur only after Arthur's retinue invades his hall, killing nine of his porters and their mastiffs.<sup>70</sup> His

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<sup>67</sup> Others, in particular Jeffrey Cohen and Sarah Sheehan, have argued that Ysbaddaden also symbolizes a hypermasculine ethos that is metonymically represented by the mountainous landscape. His unyielding control over Olwen's, and thus Culhwch's, sexuality underscores the tale's main conflict. Cohen likens the behavior of Ysbaddaden to an earthly "sexual tyranny" and argues that Culhwch's emasculation and eventual slaughter of the giant serves as a rite of passage into the contained world of Arthur's court. Cohen, *Of Giants*, 64; and Sheehan, "Giants, Boar-hunts, and Barbering: Masculinity in *Culhwch ac Olwen*," *Arthuriana* 15.3 (2005): 3-25.

<sup>68</sup> For example, the ancient Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd speaks of a series of ecological disasters that have stemmed from the waves of settlers and invaders who have come and gone from the Isle of Britain. Jon K. Williams has suggested that the ancient animals highlight the impermanence of the Arthurian world, their presence "suggesting a tangible native history of which Arthur's retinue is unaware" (177). Indeed, the owl's remarks on the continual death and regrowth of the woods speak to the insignificance of human action on a landscape whose features have been shaped by giants and other marvels. Williams, "Sleeping with an Elephant: Wales and England in the *Mabinogion*" in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England*, Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 173-90.

<sup>69</sup> Sheehan, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ysbaddaden's reaction to the attack of the Arthurian retinue has some legal justification. *The Law of Hywel Dda* details the penalties for insult (*sarhaed*) and murder (*galanas*), both of which Arthur and his

subsequent attack on the retinue is an understandable method of defense that reflects, if crudely, the heroic ethos under which the entire tale operates. His court, like Arthur's, is a sovereign space subject to courtly customs. When Arthur and Culhwch invade its space, they must complete the tasks the giant lays out for them; as Olwen warns them, their lives depend on their adherence to this custom. Ysbaddaden's position as chief of the giants runs parallel to that of Arthur as chief ruler over the Island of Britain. While they stand in opposition to one another, they are not opposites; rather, they serve complementary roles within the same cultural environment.

Ysbaddaden exists in a liminal space: his appearance marks him as monstrous, yet the text subtly reveals his desire to integrate further into the world of Arthur's court. His wish to be groomed by his future son-in-law Culhwch echoes the knight's own earlier quest to establish a kinship bond with Arthur through the homosocial act of shaving. The act of shaving Ysbaddaden takes a grotesque, ironic turn as his head is stripped along with his beard; however, his initial request demonstrates an awareness of the rites of passage into courtly society and the impulse to partake in them. His exacting requirements for the wedding feast likewise reveal his recognition of kinship rituals. While the comically absurd length and specificity of the list is likely meant to deter Culhwch from pursuing Olwen further,<sup>71</sup> it also provides the means for a wondrous and extravagant wedding for his daughter and her beloved. Once the tasks are completed and Culhwch returns to obtain Olwen, Ysbaddaden bitterly but passively accepts that his death must come. However, in his death and his daughter's subsequent marriage, Ysbaddaden has ensured his continued place within the Arthurian milieu, as his blood line will live on in the offspring of

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men enact on Ysbaddaden's court. *Sarhaed* and *galanas* are most often described as monetary payments made to a king or lord, although there are indications that some crimes could be recompensed with the perpetrator's life (167). Furthermore, Ysbaddaden's lengthy list of wonders he requires could be read as his *sarhaed* and the *galanas* of his men and mastiffs. For more on *sarhaed* and *galanas* in the medieval Welsh laws, see Dafydd Jenkins, ed. and trans., *The Law of Hywel Dda*, Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986, esp. 35-36; 63; and 154-56.

<sup>71</sup> Joan Radner has argued that this scene is intentionally comedic. The extent of Ysbaddaden's list is farcical, and Culhwch's defiant dismissal of its difficulty humorously absurd. See Radner, "Interpreting Irony in Medieval Celtic Narrative: The Case of *Culhwch ac Olwen*," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 16 (1988): 46-48.

Culhwch and Olwen, whose own giant ancestry further blurs the already unsteady line between human and monster within the text.

Ysbaddaden is just one of several giants inhabiting the world of *Culhwch*, each of whom calls attention to the tenuous relationship between hero and giant. Among the many tasks that Ysbaddaden assigns Culhwch is to collect the sword of Wrnach Gawr, a giant who, Ned Sturzer has suggested, is a martial and political rival to Ysbaddaden.<sup>72</sup> The two giants are initially presented as equivalents: both are giants who rule over fortresses and defend a valuable possession, either in the form of a daughter or a magic sword, against the incursions of Arthur's retinue. To an even greater degree than Ysbaddaden, Wrnach's misshapen body is reminiscent of the giants of romance and Eastern travel narratives. He is described as *gŵr du, mwy no thrywyr y byt hwnn* ("a black man bigger than three men of this world") (l.761).<sup>73</sup> Despite the superficial similarities between Ysbaddaden and Wrnach, the difference between the two giants soon becomes clear. Whereas Ysbaddaden can only negotiate the Arthurian world through acts of violence, Wrnach's reaction to the knights reveals that cruelty is not a universal trait among the giants. Although Wrnach poses a tangible threat to the Arthurian retinue, his court is orderly and his response to the knights reasoned and measured in comparison to the Chief Giant. More than Ysbaddaden, Wrnach demonstrates the integration of the monstrous into British society.

The first indication that Wrnach is assimilated more fully into the larger courtly culture occurs when Gwrhŷr, Bedwyr, and Cai arrive at the gates of Wrnach's fort. A bystander warns the men against approaching the fort, noting that *ny dodyw neb guestei eiroet oheni a'e uyw ganthaw. Ny edir neb idi namyn a dyccwy y gerd* ("no guest has ever come from here with his life. No one is permitted in here unless he brings his trade") (ll. 766-68). Like Ysbaddaden,

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<sup>72</sup> Sturzer, "The Purpose of *Culhwch ac Olwen*," *Studia Celtica* 39 (2005): 158.

<sup>73</sup> The figure of the large black giant, *y gŵr du mawr*, had particular resonance in medieval Welsh prose. For more on this trope, see the section entitled "The Eastern Giants of *Owein* and *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn*" in this chapter.

Wrnach has established strict rules concerning his court and severely punishes those who break them. However, unlike Ysbaddaden, Wrnach offers entry into his home to those who can offer him their services in the context of a business arrangement. Sturzer has described Wrnach as “courteous, even charming,” contrasting his welcoming behavior towards tradesman with Ysbaddaden’s indiscriminate attacks against anyone who enters his territory.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Wrnach welcomes the men, who enter the court in the guise of swordsmiths; he provides them with shelter and entrusts them with his invaluable weapon on the basis of their word alone. His interactions with the knights display his understanding both of courtly customs as well the rules that governed mercantile relationships of the medieval period. He is entirely civilized in his encounter with the knights, and if not for his epithet *cawr*, it would be unclear that he is a giant from this scene alone.

In contrast to the volatile Ysbaddaden, Wrnach’s brief appearance in the tale highlights the knights’ potential for cruelty towards the giant rather than vice versa. Having been graciously admitted to Wrnach’s court, the knights proceed to enact a ruse in which they convince him to willingly surrender his sword to them under pretense of a legitimate trade agreement. Once they gain control over the sword, they proceed to behead him without so much as a warning. Adding insult to injury, after they have struck the giant dead, they then *diffeithiaw y gaer a dwyn a vynnassant o tlysseu* (“lay waste to his fortress and take whatever treasures from it they desired”) (ll. 821-22). While they have been instructed to wrest a sword from Wrnach in order to aid Culhwch on his quest, their desecration and theft from Wrnach’s home can only be interpreted as an act of plunder. This act, combined with the murder of an unsuspecting Wrnach, inverts the roles the knights and Ysbaddaden play in the earlier episode. Here the knights play the role of the brigand whose violent outbursts threaten the order of civil society. Although Wrnach’s previous

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<sup>74</sup> Sturzer, 157.

attacks on those who approach his court mark him as a morally ambiguous character, in his interactions with Arthur's men, the boundary between hero and monster is indecipherable.

*Culhwch* further complicates conventional distinctions between human and monster in its depiction of unambiguously heroic giants. Although the ferocious Ysbaddaden (and to a lesser extent Wnach) have attracted more critical attention, the tale depicts several other giants, most of whom are sympathetic and benevolent. While Ysbaddaden and Wnach problematize the category of giant, they still retain the grotesque outward appearance and violent natural impulses associated with giants in romantic and geographic literature. On the other hand, the figures of Goreu, Custennin, and Custennin's wife are presented in an unequivocally positive light. Notably, their names do not include the descriptive *cawr*, and the text does not draw excessive attention to their size.<sup>75</sup> In fact, so subtle is their characterization that the inattentive listener or reader could easily miss that these men share more in common physically with Ysbaddaden and Wnach than Arthur and Culhwch. Although the descriptions of Ysbaddaden and Wnach more readily conform to standard depictions of giants, a fact which speaks to their roles as antagonists to the knights of the tale, figures like Goreu, Custennin, and Custennin's wife should also be read as giants despite the lack of overt orientalizing and primitivizing descriptors. These heroic giants fluidly maneuver the world of men and can even be found among its elite.

Before Arthur and his men encounter Ysbaddaden, the text introduces the Chief Giant's immediate family led by his brother Custennin. Although the family of Custennin shares the same

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<sup>75</sup> The epithet *cawr* appears frequently in descriptions of giants in medieval and early modern Welsh prose, yet it is not necessary to classify a character as a giant. Furthermore, the term *cawr* is multivalent. The *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* primarily defines *cawr* as "giant," but its alternate meanings can range from "devil" to "mighty man" to "hero" (*GPC*, s.v. "*cawr*"). The term also has symbolic potential. For example, consider the sixteenth-century Welsh ode to Elizabeth I that describes Philip II of Spain as *fal Goliath gawr* ("like the giant Goliath"), claiming *kawr yw philip gall* ("cruel Philip is a giant"). Likewise, in his 1603 treatise on the existence of giants Siôn Dafydd Rhys labels medieval historical figures such as William the Conqueror, Richard I of England, and Francis I of France as giants. When determining the status of characters as giants in early Welsh prose, I would suggest relying on physical descriptions and other contextual clues rather than solely on the use of *cawr* in a character's name. See Christine James, "Duw a Gadwo'r Frenhines!: Carol y Naw Conquerwr ac 1588," *Llên Cymru* 34 (2011): 29-61; and Grooms, 276-77.

monstrous ancestry as the more infamous Ysbaddaden, the text emphatically defends their humanity and value within the courtly order. They exemplify the understated ways that giants are revealed to be among the upper echelons of British society. Although the tale first presents him as an unsophisticated shepherd, several details are subtly revealed that quickly belie the quiet pastoral depiction of Custennin's home. The descriptive term *cawr* is never applied to Custennin; however, he is accompanied by his mastiff (*gauaelgi*) who is *noc amws naw gayaf oed mwy* ("bigger than a nine year old stallion") (ll. 419-20). The great size of Custennin's hound recalls Arthur's giant dog Cabal from the *Historia Brittonum*, a text from whose narrative traditions *Culhwch* draws.<sup>76</sup> While his ownership of a giant dog does not necessarily reflect Custennin's own proportions, his fraternal relationship to Ysbaddaden suggests that he too is larger than other men. Custennin's wife is more clearly depicted as a giant. In a comic scene, she recognizes Culhwch as her sister's son and rushes to greet him. Seeing how large and powerful she is, Cai saves his fellow knight from his aunt's crushing embrace by placing a large piece of wood between her arms, which she crushes into *vden diednedic* ("a twisted branch") (l. 464), prompting Cai to joke that her affection is *drwc* ("wicked"). Whatever physical similarity exists between the giants, however, their dispositions and relationships to the Arthurian retinue differ greatly. Custennin and his wife are portrayed in an unambiguously positive light. They welcome Arthur and his men, introduce them to Olwen, and provide useful information that allows them to conquer Ysbaddaden's court. They are also the parents of the young hero Goreu, the eventual slayer of his uncle Ysbaddaden, who is described as faultless, fair-haired, and princely, although his gigantic lineage and preternatural fighting abilities insinuates that he, too, is more wondrous than he initially appears.

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<sup>76</sup> Roberts, "*Culhwch ac Olwen*," 90-92. Roberts notes that *cabal* (MW *cafall*) is the Old Welsh word for horse, indicating a pun on the dog's large size. Although his size is not mentioned here, Cabal also appears as Arthur's dog Cafall in *Culhwch*, a fact that demonstrates the continued narrative motif of likening large dogs to horses. This connection likely informs the description of Custennin's mastiff as well.

Custennin and his family demonstrate how interdependent giants and heroes are in this society. Notably, Ysbaddaden and Custennin are immediate relatives, ostensibly raised in the same household but choosing very different paths. Custennin quickly informs the knights that he works as a shepherd despite his noble lineage due to the wicked actions of his brother. Custennin and Ysbaddaden have been feuding for unclear reasons, and the latter has murdered every one of his nephews except Goreu. That Ysbaddaden can behave so horribly to his brother suggests that his wickedness derives not from his giant nature (as Custennin, his wife, and his son all share that attribute), but rather from some idiosyncratic personality disorder. The incorporation of the monstrous and the human into a single bloodline can also be witnessed in the relationship between Custennin's wife and Culhwch: she is undoubtedly giant, yet she is also the sister of the hero's mother, which suggests marvelous, perhaps monstrous, origins for the protagonist. Culhwch's own physical stature is irrelevant: several Welsh narrative traditions throughout the medieval and early modern period bestowed gigantic or otherwise monstrous origins to figures from the heroic past. For example, in several accounts Arthur's wife Gwenhwyfar is associated with the patronym *ferch Ogfran Gawr* ("daughter of Gogfran the giant"); similarly, *Culhwch* presents the fair Olwen as the child of the wicked Ysbaddaden.<sup>77</sup> This tendency to view the heroes of British history in terms of the gigantic and grotesque had such cultural currency that it could be effectively lampooned in the slightly later *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, in which the protagonist meets giant versions of Arthur, Owain, and other legendary heroes of Welsh *cyfarwyddyd* in a dream.<sup>78</sup> By the sixteenth century, this trope had become so ingrained that Siôn Dafydd Rhys could insist that most luminaries from British history and pseudohistory, including

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<sup>77</sup> Triad 56 ("Arthur's Three Great Queens") lists the three women named Gwenhwyfar whom Arthur married; the triad claims the last of these was Gwenhwyfar ferch Ogfran Gawr. In his treatise on giants, Siôn Dafydd Rhys also names Arthur's queen Gwenhwyfar ferch Ogfran Gawr. See Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*; and Grooms, 316.

<sup>78</sup> Melville Richards, ed., *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1948).



figures as varied as Arthur, Little John from Robin Hood fame, and William the Conqueror, had all been giants.<sup>79</sup>

Although *Culhwch* merely suggests that its hero could have kinship ties to virtuous giants, it explicitly states that Cai, Arthur's best warrior, has wondrous and gigantic properties that mark him as Other. Cai is said to possess a number of special abilities, one of which is his ability to be *kyt a'r prenn uchafyn y coet...pann uei da ganthaw* ("as tall as the tallest tree in the woods when he wanted to be") (ll. 687-88). He is not a giant in the traditional sense, as his ability to shape-shift overshadows the heights to which he can grow. He is not inherently large, but rather he can choose to take a giant's form as it pleases him or serves him in his quests. Cai exists in an unstable category between monster and human and, thus, embodies the text's confusion over these categories. Cai's body is eternally adaptable to the geography of Britain: he can easily hold his breath under water for nine days and grow the height of the tallest tree at will. Furthermore, he exhibits pyrokinetic powers that allow him to provide warmth for Arthur's men and dry the land after a drenching rain. Like Ysbaddaden, Cai's remarkableness is deeply rooted in his connection to the topographical wonder; yet unlike the Chief Giant, who wishes to collect the wonders of Britain for his own personal use, Cai assimilates to his surroundings to the extent that his outsized body becomes the physical landscape.

The close association of Arthurian knights with giants reveals the importance of natural marvels in literary depictions of early British society. Moreover, the text elevates Britain's anthropological marvels, the monstrous race of giants, to heroic status. The perceived lack of decorousness in the Arthurian court of *Culhwch* has been noted time and again as one of the defining marks that the tale owes very little to the properly ordered chivalric worlds of Geoffrey

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<sup>79</sup> Siôn Dafydd Rhys's giant treatise ascribes to the popular notion that the heroism of men in the past had been reflected in their giant-like proportions. He argues that as men have strayed from this Golden Age, humans have become shorter. This belief appears only to apply to the European past, however, as Rhys forcefully argues for the continued existence of giants in the Americas. For more discussion on the ideology behind Rhys's giant treatise, see Chapters Two, Three, and Four of this dissertation. For the full text of Rhys's section on historical giants, see Grooms, 262-87.

of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>80</sup> While I believe the difference between the Arthur of *Culhwch* and the Arthur of romance has been overstated, the diverse roles giants play throughout the text reveals an alliance, however strained, between the courtly and the wild. The lack of clear delineation between the noble and the monstrous defines not just *Culhwch*, but also the post-Galfridian Welsh romances as well as the independent mytho-historical tradition of the *Mabinogi*. The important positions giants hold in these texts speak to the omnipresence of the marvelous in Middle Welsh prose as well as the tendency of the Welsh narrative tradition to envision giants as crucial actors in the events of British history. Whereas early English literature conceptualized British giants solely as a natural force against which the civilizing efforts of Brutus must contend, the native Welsh tales imagined a Britain in which giants not only coexisted with prehistoric figures, but also could be the crowned king of the island.

#### BENDIGEIDFRAN AND THE FIGURE OF THE GIANT IN WELSH MYTHOGRAPHY

The Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen ferch Lyr*, presents Britain as a space in which giants function as societal architects, serving as kings and agents of political and cultural change. The tale relates the failed attempt of Bendigeidfran, the giant king of Britain, to unite Britain and Ireland through the marriage of his sister Branwen to the Irish king Matholwch. It narrates the disastrous war he wages with the Irish in order to rescue her after the marriage deteriorates, a war that leaves both lands significantly depopulated and ensures the death of a unified, cymricized Britain. The tragedy of such a loss overwhelms the tale and speaks to the very real casualties suffered by the Welsh during both the Norman and English conquests of the land.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Bromwich and Evans, lxxxi; Roberts, “*Culhwch ac Olwen*,” 81.

<sup>81</sup> Both Catherine McKenna and Patricia Clare Ingham have commented on the colonial overtones of the text. McKenna places the tale broadly within a Norman context (c. 1075-1250) based on Ifor Williams and others’ dating of the original composition. Ingham, on the other hand, forgoes these debates and instead chooses to read the tale solely within its context in the Red Book of Hergest (c. 1400), locating it within late fourteenth-century English military and cultural incursions into Wales. McKenna, “The Colonization of Myth in *Branwen Ferch Lyr*” in *Myth in Celtic Literatures*, 105-119; and Ingham, “Marking Time: *Branwen, Daughter of Llyr* and the Colonial Refrain” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 173-192.

Due to a host of circumstances, the tale has proven difficult to date with certainty;<sup>82</sup> however, it appears likely that its original composition occurred within a Norman milieu, but incorporated various elements of native Welsh pseudohistory and oral lore. While its precise *terminus ante quem* remains open to debate, *Branwen* can likely be dated to the broad period of growing influence of Norman literary forms in Wales starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and continuing through the mid-thirteenth century vogue of French translations, including the Charlemagne material and *Ystorya Bown de Hamptwn*. Although the sheer amount of *cyfarwyddyd* alluded to in *Branwen* suggests that the tale predates the popularity of these continental literatures in Wales, its depiction of the giant king Bendigeidfran recalls the debate concerning the role of giants in early British history that was taking place in contemporaneous English, Latin, and Anglo-Norman texts. While Geoffrey and his literary successors depicted early Britain as a place in which monstrous, dangerous giants battled its founding fathers only to be killed or exiled to the far corners of the island, *Branwen* presents an alternative vision of this history in which the giants not only rule the land as respected leaders but do so from their courts on the shores of western Wales. The world of *Branwen* is one in which the giants of Albion are completely integrated into British society. Read within this context, the tale affirms the value of Welsh wonder even as it acknowledges that its marvels are illusory and its sovereignty impermanent.

The *Mabinogi* taken as a whole can be interpreted as a remarkable work of historical fiction, allegorizing a deeply felt sense of loss of Welsh independence and culture. Although the Four Branches begins with the establishment of Cambro-British hegemony led by a strong king and his marvelous, otherworldly queen, things go swiftly downhill as Britain engages in a futile

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<sup>82</sup> Although Thomas Charles Edward's date of c. 1050-1120 was accepted for several decades, Patrick Sims-Williams has challenged this opinion, concluding that based on a lack of hard historical and linguistic evidence, we cannot yet be certain of the date of the text. Sims-Williams, "The Submission of Irish Kings in Fact and Fiction: Henry II, Bendigeidfran, and the Dating of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 22 (1991): 31-61. A revised version of this essay appears in Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208-229.

war with Ireland in the Second Branch, only to lose its independence and have its heroes reduced to tradesmen in the Third Branch. By the Fourth Branch, the Welsh lords no longer control the crown in London and what is left of the Welsh aristocracy has given way to sexual deviancy and infighting that threaten to destroy what little remains of the land.<sup>83</sup> Whatever uncertain fate awaits Wales and its people by the end of the Fourth Branch, however, *Branwen* depicts a unified, mythological Britain, otherwise known as *Ynys y Kedeirn* or Island of the Mighty.<sup>84</sup> The tale introduces Bendigeidfran as *urenhin coronawc ar yr ynys hon, ac ardyrchawc o goron Lundein* (“crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London”) (ll. 1-2).<sup>85</sup> Despite the significance of London as the home of the crown and source of British sovereignty, it is clear that Bendigeidfran is a Welsh king, perhaps the last to rule from Wales, choosing to hold court in Harlech during his life and on the island of Gwales near Pembrokeshire in his death. By the end of the tale, the British court has recentered London by the treacherous Caswallawn where it remains for the rest of the *Mabinogi*.

More striking than his Welsh ethnicity, however, is Bendigeidfran’s enormous size. Although the epithet *cawr* is never used to describe him, his body is markedly different than those of his household or retinue. He is a giant king whose rule bestows sovereignty upon his subjects. Like the heroic giants of *Culhwch*, Bendigeidfran’s appearance does not conform to traditional standards of gigantic monstrosity, yet there is little doubt regarding his size. His court must be held in a tent because he is so tall he could not be contained in a house. Because he cannot fit within a boat, he wades across the Irish Sea. The swineherds who witness his coming mistake him for a

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<sup>83</sup> Lesley Jacobs has argued that the effects of this infighting can be seen as early as the Second Branch, and it is this domestic instability, not the war with Ireland, that leads Britain on a path of self-destruction. Jacobs, “Trouble in the Island of the Mighty: Kinship and Violence in *Branwen ferch Lyr*,” *Viator* 40.2 (2009): 113-33.

<sup>84</sup> In his giant treatise, Siôn Dafydd Rhys argues that the *kedeirn* referred to in the name *Ynys y Kedeirn* refers specifically to the race of giants who ruled early Britain. To support this claim, he states that the island was alternatively called *Ynys y Cewri*, or Island of the Giants. Grooms, 249.

<sup>85</sup> Derick S. Thomson, ed., *Branwen Uerch Lyr* (Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 2003).

mountain and his eyes for two lakes.<sup>86</sup> When his men cannot cross the Liffey, he acts as a bridge for them, his body large enough to span the width of the river and support the weight of his retinue. His body is grotesque, but its exaggerated features allow him to provide proper support to his men and intimidate his enemies. The literary motif of monstrous nobility was rare during the medieval period. Although it found great popularity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the figure of the noble savage was uncommon in the geographies and histories of the Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> Where they exist, these figures were often depicted as remnants of a purer and more primitive past; their disproportionate bodies and wild natural surroundings contrast with the orderly and rational world of the reader, ultimately confirming the supremacy of the latter. Bendigeidfran certainly represents an idealized vision of the past; however, he is far from savage. Although he must keep court in tents, they are prepared *ar ureint kyweirdeb yneud* (“in the fashion of arranging a hall”) (l. 127). There is little indication that Matholwch and the Irish feel insulted by their reception in these tents before Bendigeidfran’s seemingly non-giant brother Efnysien slays their horses, the one truly monstrous and senseless act committed by any member of the British nobility. It is only Bendigeidfran’s diplomacy that temporarily salvages the fragile Hiberno-British relationship after his brother’s assault.

Bendigeidfran’s appearance does not reveal a barbaric soul or primitive impulses; instead his height reflects his status and his importance in the Cambro-British culture depicted in the tale. He ably fulfils the role of leader and culture hero, ultimately sacrificing himself in pursuit of the preservation of his people and his land against forces he cannot quite control. For example, once

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<sup>86</sup> Alfred Siewers has argued that the protagonist of the *Mabinogi* is the landscape of Britain, personified in the Second Branch by Bendigeidfran. Although I disagree with Siewers that the *Mabinogi* performs an ultimately mythological narrative of the loss of a Sovereignty Goddess whose presence ensures the fruitfulness of the land and its people, it seems clear to me that Bendigeidfran’s body metonymically represents a mytho-historical Britain whose decapitation signifies the fragmentation of the land. By holding on to his head after his death, his men are able to preserve the illusion of a Welsh-centered Britain until the moment when it must be reincorporated to the physical landscape in an act of burial. Siewers, “Writing an Icon of the Land: the *Mabinogi* as a Mystagogy of Landscape,” *Peritia* 19 (2005): 203-05.

<sup>87</sup> Friedman, 165.

he learns of the mistreatment of his sister Branwen by Matholwch, he seeks counsel from his men who agree to assemble a retinue to rescue her. After he has been wounded in the ensuing battle and ensured a British victory (however hollow), he sacrifices himself for the sake of his men, instructing them to decapitate him and carry his head first to Wales then to London, where it will serve as a talisman protecting Britain from threats across the English Channel. The disturbing image of the disembodied giant head appears throughout medieval insular literature and is typically associated with martial glee over the defeat of a monstrous enemy, for example Arthur's beheading of the giant of Mont Saint-Michel or Goreu's beheading of Ysbaddaden. In *Branwen*, however, the head of Bendigeidfran subverts this trope: rather than horrifying those who see it, it gives solace to the Welsh and protects them from the harsh new political realities of Caswallawn's London-based rule. Its eventual burial in London serves as a reminder to future leaders of Britain that the island was once united under the rule of Cambro-British kings whose memory can be buried but not forgotten. In this way, Bendigeidfran's head serves the same function of the giant fossils of Britain described by Siôn Dafydd Rhys in his treatise: both are geological evidence of a marvelous past whose mere existence threatens the hegemonic historical narratives of the ruling elite.<sup>88</sup>

The text of *Branwen* repeatedly challenges contemporaneous pseudohistorical accounts of the giants of Britain that depict the island's earliest inhabitants as monstrous and celebrate their eventual deposal. Like *Culhwch*, *Branwen* subverts the popular image of Wales as the home of giants not by denying the claim, but by representing them not as monsters, but as kings and heroes whose existence contributes to the greatness of the land. Nowhere is this clearer in the tale than the brief story Matholwch relates to Bendigeidfran concerning a family of Irish giants he exiled from his land. When Bendigeidfran grants a magical cauldron of renewal to Matholwch to recompense him for the slaughter of his horses, the Irish king reveals that he knows the

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<sup>88</sup> For more on giant artifacts in Rhys's treatise, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.

cauldron's origin and how it came to be in Britain. While hunting one day, he happened to come across a giant, Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid, and his wife who were using the cauldron to spawn a race of giants in Ireland. Matholwch is taken aback by their ghastly appearance, which conforms to standard grotesque descriptions of giants: the king describes the male giant as *gwr melyn-goch mawr* ("a large amber-colored man") (l. 158)<sup>89</sup> and *gwr...athrugar mawr, a drygweith anorles arnaw* ("a huge monstrous man with the unsightly appearance of a brigand about him") (ll. 159-60). As frightful as the man is, Matholwch claims that the giant's wife was twice as hideous. Despite their appearance, the king allows them to stay in Ireland for four months before relenting to the pressure of his subjects to rid the land of them. Although he claims they harassed his noblemen, Matholwch does not reveal the details of their crimes, leaving the audience to speculate that the mere presence of the giants, rather than any specific behavior on their part, was offensive to the Irish. The king and his men proceed to trap the giants in a white-hot iron house, killing all but Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his wife, who flee with the cauldron to Britain. When he hears this tale, Bendigeidfran remarks that he knows the couple and indicates that his experience with them differs greatly. He tells Matholwch:

*Eu rannu ym pob lle yn y kyuoeth, ac y maent yn lluosauc, ac yn dyrchauael ym pob lle, ac yn cadarnhau y uann y bythont, o wyr ac arueu goreu a weles neb*

I dispersed them throughout the kingdom. They are numerous and prosperous everywhere, strengthening whatever place they might be with the best men and arms that anyone has seen (ll. 194-96).

Besides foreshadowing the cruelty Branwen experiences at the hand of her Irish captors, this episode also reveals the unexpectedly warm reception giants are given within Wales. Rather than

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<sup>89</sup> While Sioned Davies's translation of the tale renders *gŵr melyn-goch* as "red-yellow haired man," it is possible that this descriptor refers to skin (rather than hair) color. The *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* lists "red-skinned" and "red (of the skin colour of Red Indians)" among the definitions of *melyn-goch* (GPC, s.v. "melyn-goch"), although this use of the word certainly developed long after the composition of *Branwen*. However, if we take *melyn-goch* to refer to skin color, Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his wife's appearance more closely follow medieval ethnographic conventions that view giants as members of exotic Eastern races, often Moorish in their appearance. Similar figures can be found throughout Welsh romance, in particular the *gwŷr du mawr* ("large black men") whom I discuss later in this chapter.

viewing them as a monstrous burden, as do the Irish, Bendigeidfran instead welcomes them, and they subsequently thrive, becoming among the strongest and noble of British subjects.

Andrew Welsh has suggested that the tale of the Irish giants reveals a lapse of good judgment on the part of Bendigeidfran: by inviting them into Britain, he endangers his subjects and sets in motion a potential internal invasion. He likens Bendigeidfran to the notorious quisling Vortigern and the giants to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>90</sup> While this pattern certainly has a long-established precedent in insular, and particularly Welsh, narrative tradition,<sup>91</sup> there is no indication in the text that the giants will revolt. In fact, it appears that the opposite is true. One of the men to whom Bendigeidfran entrusts the island during his travels in Ireland is evocatively named Llashar ap Llasar Llaesgyngwyd, whose name recalls that of Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid. The closeness of these names suggests that by the time of the events of *Branwen*, the descendents of the original Irish giants have integrated themselves completely within the upper levels of the British aristocracy. This incorporation of giants into the larger body politic would be entirely consistent not only with the text of *Branwen*, a tale with giant royalty, but also with the larger corpus of medieval Welsh narrative in which giants function at various levels of society.

#### THE MEDIEVAL WELSH ORIENTALIST IMPULSE

Within tales such as *Branwen* and *Culhwch*, marvels are naturalized as part of the native landscape. At the same time, they uphold such marvels as evidence of cultural exceptionalism and the existence of the Welsh heroic past. By naturalizing wonder, these tales resist dominant insular discourses that fetishized Welsh *mirabilia* as symptomatic of an uncivilized society. For many English authors of the medieval period, the Welsh landscape was an exotic otherworld whose marvels promised treasures and dangers for those who dared to visit its foreboding terrain. This

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<sup>90</sup> Welsh, "Beowulf, Branwen, and the Tragic Peaceweaver Tale," *Viator* 22 (1991):10-11.

<sup>91</sup> For example, a series of similar events leads to the downfall of Pryderi and the kingdom of Dyfed in the Fourth Branch.



characterization not only exoticized the Welsh people, but it also dismissed them as incapable of participating in contemporary English civil life. This marginalization derived from ancient beliefs that rooted physical and cultural difference in geographical difference: the further one strayed from the earth's center (i.e. the Mediterranean), the more variant the people and the landscape.<sup>92</sup> This phenomenon can be seen most clearly in the tradition of the Wonders of the East, which placed dog-headed men, anthropophagi, and other monsters in the far eastern reaches of Asia. Similarly, Wales represented part of the world's western edge and thus housed its own natural wonders. In English texts, the ramifications of this geographic fetishization were generally negative, as tales of the uncivilized men of the West could excuse ongoing colonization and disenfranchisement of the Welsh.

Welsh literature of the period, however, tells a remarkably different story. During this period, the influence of English literature continued to expand in Wales, and Welsh authors were not immune to the growing *mirabilia* traditions that blurred the divisions between the Far East and the Far West. Rather than rejecting racialized English discourse, Welsh authors embraced elements of orientalist literature and integrated them into native lore. If the native tradition sought to domesticate wonder, later medieval tales exoticized the Welsh landscape, locating within it Indian castles and African giants. By doing so, they subversively re-appropriated the wonders of the East, transforming Welsh alterity into a source of national pride. As in the English tradition, Welsh wonder tales highlight the land's isolation from its more powerful neighbor; however, in these texts, this isolation serves not as a prerequisite for conquest, but rather as proof of the exceptional nature of its inhabitants. As they obscure the lines between Wales and the East, these texts highlight the ability of both to resist absorption into totalizing foreign cultures. In this section, I will consider several Middle Welsh tales that rely upon orientalist narratives and argue

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<sup>92</sup> For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Friedman, 37-58; and Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 183-202.

that these texts defamiliarize the Welsh landscape to defend its autonomy in the face of English hegemony.

#### **BREUDWYT MAXEN, PRESTER JOHN, AND THE PROMISE OF IMAGINARY LANDSCAPES**

Gerald of Wales was not the only notable literary traveler through the Welsh landscape. Middle Welsh prose, including Welsh language translations and adaptations of continental materials, often features protagonists who encounter a variety of marvelous (and at times monstrous) creatures and natural wonders as they explore the land. These tales ultimately depict Wales as a wondrous space full of magical castles, fountains, and passages to the subterranean world that nevertheless remain somehow rooted in the actual geography of the land.<sup>93</sup> Like their English counterparts, these Middle Welsh tales depict marvels that are not rooted solely in the lived landscapes of Wales, but also in the depictions of India and other foreign lands readily available to their authors in the geographies, romances, and encyclopedias that flooded the literary marketplace from the twelfth century onwards.<sup>94</sup> In this literature, the wonders of western Wales echo those of the Far East of the European literary imagination. For example, *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* (“The Dream of Emperor Maxen”) transforms Wales into an orientalized space

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<sup>93</sup> Brynley Roberts has suggested that the geographic specificity of these wonders demonstrates a familiarity with the Welsh countryside that “could have been produced only by one who had travelled these roads and surveyed the scene for himself” (lxxvi). Recently, Francesco Benozzo has challenged this notion, emphasizing the dreamlike quality of the land and the accompanying vagueness of details that accompany such descriptions: “The real landscape disappears: it becomes a ‘structural envelope’ made of projections, directions, and planes. Finally, this is not a landscape actually experienced, but a dreamt landscape” (130). He goes on to suggest that Welsh prose texts often take place in an *Ur-landscape* “where all the forests are described as the same forest, all plains resemble each other, because they are no longer real places, but ‘symbolic forms’” (135). Although I agree that the marvels and monsters that populate the Wales of medieval tales fictionalize the landscape in a way that separates it from the real Wales as experienced by the reader, I feel that Benozzo underestimates the onomastic and historical value of the tales as well as their potentia to give meaning to the experienced landscape. Roberts, “Introduction” in *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005); and Benozzo, *Landscape Perception in Early Celtic Literature* (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004).

<sup>94</sup> Much ink has been spilled over the perceived pagan Celtic origins of the more fantastical elements of the Welsh prose tradition, and it is beyond the scope or intent of this dissertation to engage in that debate. However, despite any influence of oral culture on the tales, it has become clear that this literature owes a great debt to the larger intellectual trends of its time. The influence of authors and works as wide-ranging as Isidore of Seville, the Wonders of the East, Chrétien de Troyes, the *Imago Mundi*, and the letter of Prester John (to name only a few) can be felt on medieval Welsh geographical and fiction writing.

reminiscent of the lands of Prester John. In this tale, the pseudohistorical Roman emperor Maxen dreams of a beautiful Welsh woman for whom he must journey from Rome to Caernarfon, where he eventually relocates his seat of imperial power. His journey evokes tales of travels to exotic and luxuriant Asian courts. The text emphasizes the physical alterity of Wales and its role on the physical margins of the civilized world, a position that simultaneously privileges it as it isolates it from a larger European whole.

*Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* is often described as one of the most self-consciously literary tales in the corpus of medieval Welsh prose,<sup>95</sup> and its relationship to the genre of medieval dream visions is evident.<sup>96</sup> The tale begins as Roman Emperor Maxen falls asleep near the bucolic royal hunting grounds and dreams of a mountainous landscape whose riches far surpass those of Rome. In the vision, he meets the fairest woman he has ever seen, and he wishes to make her his empress. When he awakes, he relates the dream to his men and instructs them to scour the world in search of this land and the woman it conceals. They soon discover that the land the emperor envisions is Gwynedd in North Wales, and the woman he loves resides in a castle in Caernarfon (here given its more archaic name Abersaint). Maxen's emissaries beseech the lady to join the emperor in Rome, but she refuses. Instead, Maxen must join her in Wales and rule his empire from there. After several years of marital bliss in Caernarfon, the emperor's rule in Rome is threatened; however, he quells the threat with his Welsh army and retakes Rome. As a reward for their valour, he grants his Welsh brothers-in-law rule over the Roman stronghold of Brittany, thus effectively linking Roman and British imperial rule.

The emperor's first impression of Wales is that of a landscape overwhelming in the abundance of its natural marvels: in this text, the Welsh mountains, breathtaking on their own,

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<sup>95</sup> Roberts, *Breudwyt Maxen*, lxix.

<sup>96</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between medieval dream interpretation and Middle Welsh narrative, see Catherine McKenna, "'What Dreams May Come Must Give Us Pause': *Breudwyt Ronabwy* and the Red Book of Hergest," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 58 (2009): 69-99.

contain even greater wonders hidden in their crevices. Maxen describes the land as naturally superior to any other country he has seen. In his dream, he witnesses *e menyd uchaf* (“the highest mountain”), *gwladod gwastat tecaf* (“the fairest flat lands”), and *y enys decaf o’r byt* (“the fairest island in the world”).<sup>97</sup> He also imagines a variety of manmade marvels, including *phrif dyroed amyl amlwyau* (“many tall multi-colored towers”) and a bridge constructed from whale ivory.

The topography of his imagined land contrasts starkly with the pastoral setting of his hunt:

*e gwelei vynyded diffwys a cherryc uchel , a thir agarw amdyfrwys ny ry welsei  
eryoet e gyfryu. Ac odeno e gwelei enys en e mor gyuarwyneb a’r tir amdyfrwys  
hwnnw ac y rygthau a’r enys e gwelei ef wlat a oed gyhyt e maestir a’r mor,  
kyhyt y choet a’e menyd*

He saw steep mountains and high rocks and fierce and rugged land, the kind of which he had never seen before. And there he saw an island in the sea facing that rugged land, and between him and the island he saw a land whose plains were as wide as the sea, its mountains as vast as its woods.<sup>98</sup>

The land he seeks is fully exoticized space that entices him, providing an alternative to an orderly, courtly Roman landscape.

As Maxen explores this marvelous landscape, he quickly discovers that the people who populate the land rival it in beauty and wonder. Once he reaches the end of his journey, he discovers *prifgaer decaf* (“the fairest castle”) whose luxury exceeds anything he might see in even the finest courts of Rome. The castle displays all the mineral wealth of the land: its halls are comprised entirely of gold and decorated with *vain gwerthauur llewychedic* (“sparkling gemstones”). Two red-headed lads play with a gold and silver *gwyddbwyll* set while their father carves gold chess pieces for them on his throne, an impressive chair made *o asgwrn eliphant a delw deu eryr arnei o rudeur* (“of the ivory of elephants with the image of two eagles in red gold

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<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that while not all of the marvelous geographical features he witnesses are located in Britain, they are part of the experience of finding Britain and are thus intimately tied to the landscape of Britain itself. Furthermore, while Maxen clearly describes the continental route from Rome to Caernarfon, only the Isle of Britain and the Welsh localities therein are explicitly named in the text. Here, *The Book of John Mandeville* provides a useful parallel. In this work, the further east Mandeville travels from Jerusalem, the more exotic the people and places appear to him. Although not all of the marvels he describes can be found in India, they are part of the journey to India and are therefore linked to India and its own marvels in a profound way.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts, *Bruedwyt Maxen*, 2.

on it”). Their clothes are of the finest silk covered in gold and rubies; they wear gold jewelry, and their shoes are of Cordovan leather. Finally, Maxen spies the greatest marvel of the land: the beautiful woman whom he sent his men to the furthest corners of the earth to find. The woman (whose name we later learn is Elen) takes on an almost iconic role in Maxen’s imagination: *nyt oed haus edrech arnei na disgwyl noc ar er heul pan vyd taerafa thecafrac y theket hitheu* (“because of her beauty, it was no more easy to gaze upon her than to stare at the sun when it is at its brightest and most radiant”).<sup>99</sup>

Maxen falls madly in love with his vision, and when he awakens, he is distraught, suffering from a profound case of longing that will not abate until his dream can be realized, a task that sends the Roman army to *y deir bann e byt* (“the three corners of the world,” that is Europe, Africa, and Asia) in search of this land. Wales remains hidden in geographical obscurity for many years, and it is only at the last minute, when Maxen is almost given to permanent despair, that he learns that the island he dreamt of is named Britain, the castle named Abersaint, and the woman named Elen. The structure of the tale withholds this information from both Maxen and the reader until the story is halfway complete, building suspense as to the location of the land. Readers of medieval travel narratives and Eastern romances would have recognized commonplace elements like the bejeweled castle and the extreme terrain from such tales. Notably, Maxen first sends his scout to Africa and Asia, parts of the world known at the time for the kind of marvelous landscape and telluric wealth of which Maxen dreams. In *Breudwyt Maxen*,

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<sup>99</sup> Because of the awe-striking nature of Elen’s beauty as well as the forfeiture of her land to Maxen after their marriage, she has historically been read as a Welsh iteration of the Celtic sovereignty goddess prominent in a handful of Old Irish texts. Such a reading has fallen out of fashion in the last several decades, and I concur that there is no real basis for applying Old Irish mythological concepts onto Welsh texts written centuries later, particularly for a text such as *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic*, which is so unmistakably born from literary genres popular throughout medieval Europe. However, the description of Elen radiating beauty and light is striking, and there seems to me to be little doubt of her close connection to the land in Maxen’s imagination. It is likely, as George Brewer and Bedwyr Lewis Jones have suggested, that this detail works towards establishing the “dreamy aura” that defines the tale. I would also suggest that her beauty underscores the beauty of the land and explains why Maxen would be so willing to move his court from Rome to Caernarfon. See Brewer and Jones, “Popular Tale Motifs and Historical Tradition in *Breudwyt Maxen*,” *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975): 23-30.

however, these treasures are found in the far western reaches of Britain, not India or Ethiopia. Maxen ventures to Wales, recreating the route from his dream, and begins the colonizing process of bringing the land under the aegis of the Roman Empire. First, he swiftly defeats Beli, the British king in London, and then seeks Elen as his bride. As Brynley Roberts has noted, the path Maxen takes from Rome to Wales corresponds to the pilgrimage route that the author of the tale would know from either written sources or personal experience.<sup>100</sup> In this case, however, the direction of pilgrimage is reversed, with Maxen leaving the holy land of Rome for a land more marvelous than his own.

In the past few years, scholars of this text have focused their attention on the colonial relationship between Rome and Britain as it elucidates the nature of the relationship between Wales and its colonial overseer, England, during the later Middle Ages. The relatively peaceful nature of the conquest presented in the tale as well as the positive relationship between Maxen and his British subjects could have provided a model for the Welsh who were undergoing their own subjugation in the form of the Edwardian conquest around the time the *Breudwyt Maxen* was written.<sup>101</sup> In the introduction to his edition, Brynley Roberts remarks that the text fictionalizes conquest in a way that makes it palatable to a Welsh audience.<sup>102</sup> Christina Chance has argued that the tale celebrates the colonial connection of ancient Britain (and thus Wales) to Rome, noting that Welsh authors often relied upon this connection to promote the importance of Welsh

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<sup>100</sup> Roberts, *Breudwyt Maxen*, lxxvii-lxxviii.

<sup>101</sup> *Breudwyt Maxen Wledig* is generally accepted to have been first composed in the late twelfth century. However, Brynley Roberts has recently suggested a revision of this dating. He suggests that the tale was written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, corresponding with Llywelyn Fawr's military successes. While I feel that Roberts makes a strong case for this date, it seems to me that the theme of outside incursion (however friendly it may be) is too prevalent in this text for the author to be referring to a newly consolidated Welsh power rather than a new colonial reality. I think Roberts is correct in amending the date to the thirteenth century, although I would date the text slightly later, corresponding instead with the incursion of English troops into Welsh strongholds, in particular Gwynedd. Roberts, "Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig: Why? When?" in *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Traditions: Studies in Honor of Patrick K. Ford*, Eds. Joseph Nagy and Leslie Ellen Jones (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 303-14.

<sup>102</sup> Roberts, *Breudwyt Maxen*, liii.

cultural identity. Maxen's settlement in Gwynedd suggests the equivalence of Welsh and Roman authority, even if the Romans remain primarily in charge of the island.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Jon Williams positions the tale as an example of postcolonial mimicry. He argues that the tale "is primarily concerned with defining the agency of the colonized, with determining how and in what way a colonized space, a province, can exert influence on an empire as a whole."<sup>104</sup> In Williams's opinion, the tale serves as a model for all future colonial encounters between Wales and England: just as Elen is able to secure positions of power for herself as empress and her brothers as rulers of Brittany, the Welsh could equally improve their status through cooperation rather than resistance. Although these readings differ in important ways, each emphasizes the fact that Elen deftly manipulates what could be a mournful scene of conquest into an opportunity to elevate the status of both herself and the Welsh people.

I would build upon these arguments to suggest that Elen does more than simply secure a place for her family in the colonial administration of Britain; instead, her actions destabilize the geography of the Roman Empire, shifting its center from Rome to the periphery of western Wales. Britain becomes a Roman colony only on the terms that it replaces Rome as the seat of authority. It is striking that when Maxen's scouts first encounter her in her castle, they address her as Empress of Rome (*amperodres Rvuein*), recognizing her regal nature almost immediately.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the tale, Maxen submits to her demands far more than she does his. While she agrees to marry him, she refuses to leave Wales, insisting that he rule the Roman Empire from her home

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<sup>103</sup> Christina Chance, "Maxen Wledic and the Power of the Roman Past" in *Imagining Empire: Maxen Wledic, Arthur, and Charlemagne in Welsh Literature after the Edwardian Conquest* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2010), 44-105.

<sup>104</sup> Williams, "Sleeping with an Elephant," 181.

<sup>105</sup> The title *amherodres* is very rare in Middle Welsh narrative, applied only one other time in the course of the *Mabinogion* to refer to the Empress of Constantinople whom Peredur marries and with whom he reigns (and about whom I will talk later in this chapter). Patrick Sims-Williams and Natalia Petrovskaja have remarked that the term seems reserved for someone with her own independent sovereignty rather than for someone who marries an emperor. See Sims-Williams, "Some functions of origin stories in Early Medieval Wales" in *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, Ed. T. Nyberg et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), 97-131; and Petrovskaja, "Dating *Peredur*: New Light on Old Problems," *PHCC* 29 (2009): 223-43.

in Gwynedd. In order to fulfill his dream of marrying Elen, he must not only recreate his dream journey through the wondrous landscape, but also adopt her land as his own and designate it the site of his court. Furthermore, while Maxen may nominally be the emperor of Britain, she and her father are its true rulers. When Maxen asks her what she demands for her *agweddi* (bride price), she states that she desires that her father receive the Island of Britain as well as its three adjacent islands (i.e. Man, Wight, and Orkney) and that he serve directly under her authority rather than that of Maxen. She also requests that three chief forts be built in her honor in Caernarfon, Caerllion, and Caerfyrddin. The text mentions that before Maxen can relocate to Britain he must have Roman soil brought there so that the land would be *yachussach e'r amperauder y gygsu ac y eisted ac y orymdeith endi* (“healthier for the emperor to sleep and sit and rule in it”). However, this small bit of land pales in comparison to the sweeping mountainous landscapes of Wales: although the rugged Welsh terrain is now mixed with a small amount of Roman soil, this mixing does little to affect the fundamental character of the land.

This joining of Welsh and Roman authority does not occur bloodlessly: almost as an aside, the text notes that when Maxen arrives in Britain, he first overthrows Beli son of Manogan, the crowned king in London according to traditional Welsh lore, and drives him and his sons into the sea (*gyrru wynt ar vor*).<sup>106</sup> The imagery of Beli being driven into the sea is particularly evocative of Gildas’s well-known account of the Anglo-Saxon invasion,<sup>107</sup> potentially connecting the conquest of Maxen with the conquest of Hengist and Horsa, a link that threatens to overshadow all positive interactions between Welshmen and the Roman. Moreover, the dethroning of Beli also recalls the exile of the sons of Albina, further identifying the pre-Saxon

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<sup>106</sup> For instance, see the *Mabinogion* tale *Lludd a Llefelys*, which associates Beli and his son Lludd with the establishment of London as the political center of Britain, or *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, which describes Beli’s grandson Bendigeidfran as *vrenhin coronawc ar yr ynys honn ac arderchawc o goron Lundein* (“crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London”).

<sup>107</sup> *Repellunt barbari ad mare, repellit mare ad barbaros; inter haec duo genera funerum aut iugulamur aut mergimur*. (“The barbarians drive us towards the sea, the sea drives us towards the barbarians; between these two modes of death, either we are slain or we drown”). Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, §20.



kings with the legendary race of British giants. This scene certainly emphasizes the instability of Romano-Welsh relations in the text; however, I would suggest an alternative reading of this conquest. As others have noted, the tale offers an anachronistic vision of a unified Britain that never existed. During the Middle Ages, London's role as the administrative and commercial center of the island grew rapidly, and thus many of these Welsh tales feature London as the crown jewel of a pre-Saxon British empire. Yet *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* rejects London as the site of political unification; instead, it argues for a British civic life centered in Caernarfon, a town heavily Cymricized even to this day, rather than London, the home of the English ruling elite. The proposed thirteenth-century dating of the text strengthens this claim, as it corresponds with the rise of Llywelyn Fawr and the increased role that Gwynedd played in pan-Welsh political relations in the years leading up to the Edwardian Conquest of 1282.<sup>108</sup>

The presence of Elen's wondrous castle in Caernarfon provides further evidence that the tale should be read as a story of *translatio imperii* from Rome to Wales. The landscape of Wales as a whole is presented as a marvel that is worth traveling to the edges of the earth to see, and the jewel-encrusted castle is emblematic of the land's suitability to house an emperor. Of course, any reader familiar with Caernarfon will be aware that an impressive castle has stood there since the medieval period and remains one of Wales's primary tourist destinations. Although a fortification has stood in Caernarfon since Roman times, it wasn't until after the fall of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd that the castle began to take its current form under the aegis of Edward I. The castles built during this period in Wales are awe-inspiring in their scope and design, and Caernarfon Castle is perhaps the most majestic. Like Elen's castle, it appears to rise out of the landscape as a symbol of imperial splendor. The Edwardian castles of Wales were a visual reminder of the English conquest of Wales and its diminished role as colonial state, an event that perhaps occurred within living memory of the tale's initial composition and certainly within a few generations of our earliest extant redaction of the text. However, in *Brwedwyt Maxen Wledic*, the castle at

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<sup>108</sup> See fn. 101.

Caernarfon is presented as a fully Welsh castle, its wealth and magnificence far surpassing that of its Edwardian counterpart. The text reappropriates the castle for the Welsh: it is shown to exist well before the English arrival to the island and to be the seat of an imagined empire ruled from its throne. The castle is just one among many of the marvels that relocates Maxen to Wales, and in that context the castle, a potentially painful symbol of loss, becomes naturalized into the Welsh landscape. In the English texts discussed above, the wonders of the Welsh landscape serve to denigrate the Welsh and separate them from the larger British political body. However, in *Brudedwyt Maxen*, it is through these marvels that the Welsh secure their autonomy.

In this way, *Brudedwyt Maxen* comfortably fits into the long tradition of Welsh *mirabilia* texts that highlight the strangeness of Welsh geography while simultaneously celebrating it for its marvelous nature. The *mirabilia* list at the end of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* connected the wonders of the landscape with the history of the Britons,<sup>109</sup> while tracts such as *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Prydein* argued Arthurian origins for topographical oddities.<sup>110</sup> The wonder tract *Enwau ac Anrhyfeddodau Ynys Prydein* (“The Names and Wonders of the Island of Britain”), which appears in dozens of manuscripts from the twelfth-century onwards, depicts the strangeness of the landscape as its virtue and in doing so suggests that this virtue is reflected in the contemporary Welsh people.<sup>111</sup> These tracts, which enumerate the wonders of Wales, praise the rugged landscape as inherently noble, defamiliarizing it in order to elevate it into something sublime. These texts draw inspiration from the wider European genre of *mirabilia*, particularly the subset of that genre that details the Wonders of the East. Elsewhere, I have argued that Welsh *mirabilia* tracts, notably the *Anrhyfeddodau*, engage the orientalist rhetoric of this genre to

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<sup>109</sup> Morris, “De mirabilibus Britanniae” in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, 81-83.

<sup>110</sup> Peter C. Bartrum, ed., “Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Prydein,” *Études Celtiques* 10 (1963): 434-77.

<sup>111</sup> Ifor Williams, ed., “Enwau ac Anrhyfeddodau Ynys Prydein,” *BBCS* 5.1 (1929): 19-24. See also Cassandra Conley, “Various Things of Great Worth: The Wonders of India and Wales in Peniarth 15,” *PHCC* 30 (2010): 61-81.

position Wales as a spiritual equivalent to India.<sup>112</sup> In particular, I have suggested the importance of the letter of Prester John, a twelfth-century forgery purportedly written by the legendary Christian king of India, to the medieval Welsh geographical imagination. Two Middle Welsh translations of the tale are extant in multiple manuscripts, and references to the priest-king can be found throughout the work of the *gogynfeirdd* and the *beirdd yr uchelwyr*.<sup>113</sup> The landscape of *Breudwyt Maxen* similarly mirrors the marvelous landscape surrounding the court of Prester John; by doing so, it aligns Wales and India as distant paradises that contain great wonder and promise. Furthermore, in both texts cultural identity is securely rooted in the singularity of the landscape and the telluric wealth it offers.

The letter of Prester John (MW *Ystoria Gwlat Ieuan Vendigeit*), one of the greatest medieval literary hoaxes, began circulating in its Latin form around 1165 after the failure of the Second Crusade.<sup>114</sup> Its purported author was the Eastern priest-king Prester John, whose legend first appeared in the West in Otto of Friesing's *Chronicon* in the entry for 1145. In the letter, Prester John addresses the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus, claiming that he is the sovereign of the "three Indias," in which he governs a kingdom of preternaturally devout Christians. He describes his immense wealth and the marvels that fill every corner of his land, which he offers to his Western readers as a sign of his munificence and Christian charity. The letter functions as a compendium of the geographic lore of the ancient and medieval West: it includes the topographical and zoographical wonders that were synonymous with the Eastern exotic by the Middle Ages. Prester John presents his land as a utopic alternative to an ordered European landscape. The extensive number of marvels to be found within the borders of his

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<sup>112</sup> Conley, *ibid*.

<sup>113</sup> Gwilym Lloyd Edwards, ed., *Ystoria Gwlat Ieuan Vendigeit* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

<sup>114</sup> For a history of the letter of Prester John and its continued legacy in European history, see Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1972). Gwilym Lloyd Edwards's introduction provides a concise history of the letter, in particular its transmission into Welsh and other vernaculars. See Edwards, *Ieuan Vendigeit*, lxxxviii-cxvi.

kingdom challenge Western conceptions of faith, bodily integrity, and natural law. He presents his kingdom as an alternative to Rome and sees himself as equal, if not superior, to the Pope.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the letter, he emphasizes his own alterity; for example, he repeatedly boasts of his heretical Nestorian faith, a fact that gave Rome great consternation when the letter began to circulate in the late twelfth century.<sup>116</sup> Although the letter has come to be more broadly associated with monstrous races of the East,<sup>117</sup> the Welsh translations of the tale accentuate the otherworldly beauty of the wonders of India rather than the supposed freakishness of its inhabitants. The Welsh Letter of Prester John primarily concerns itself with the unique topographical marvels of the land that compel travelers and pilgrims to seek it.

Like the North Wales of Elen and her father in *Breudwyt Maxen*, the India of Prester John is full of jewel encrusted treasures unlike any Rome has ever seen. In the letter, the geological richness of India lures visitors to its shores, rather than tales of the Plinian monsters and demons familiar to medieval audiences from the encyclopedic tradition. Gioia Zaganelli has shown that the non-interpolated Latin text from which the Welsh translations derive relies more heavily on lapidaries than it does on the ethnographic traditions of the Wonders of the East.<sup>118</sup> For example,

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<sup>115</sup> Notably, one version of the Welsh Letter of Prester John appears in the thirteenth-century Book of Llanddewi Brefi (Oxford, Jesus College MS 119), a manuscript that has drawn critical attention for its own nativist religious sentiments. See Conley, 61-69.

<sup>116</sup> Silverberg, *ibid.*, 12-15; 21-24; and 60-63. Pope Alexander III, who famously wrote back to the mythical priest king, expressed happiness that Christianity thrived beyond Muslim lands, but advised that John be instructed in the true Christian faith and offer himself for baptism in the Roman church. An edition of Alexander III's letter can be found in Friedrich Zarncke, "Der Brief des Papstes Alexanders III an den Priester Johannes" in *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes*, Eds. Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 103-112, originally published in *Abhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft* 17 (1879): 935-44.

<sup>117</sup> The letter is influenced by the Wonders of the East and the tradition of the Plinian races, the monstrous creatures who lived on the edges of the world; yet these creatures do not generally appear in the earliest versions of the text, including the Middle Welsh translations. In the fourteenth century, versions of the letter that include interpolated elements of the Alexander Romance that feature monstrous races appeared, but the earliest versions of the letter are missing these elements. See Edwards, *Ieuan Vendigeit*, lxxxviii-xc.

<sup>118</sup> Gioia Zaganelli, "L'Orient du prêtre Jean et la tradition encyclopédique du Moyen Âge," *Perspectives médiévales* 24 (1998): 97-107. For a brief overview of the tradition of lapidaries and their influence on medieval literature, see also Maria Teresa Zanola, "Le langage des pierres précieuses et l'expression des sentiments," *Moyen Français* 50 (2002): 47-60.

Prester John relates the story of a marvelous river full of a variety of gemstones in which amphibious children swim for treasure. Although he notes the oddity of the children's abilities, his interests lie not in these curious children, but rather in the marvelous stones and gems they hunt. While he understates the marvel of amphibious men, he goes to great lengths to enumerate the color and nature of every gemstone in his land. Other episodes from the text indicate a similar fascination with the lithic marvels of the land that supersedes interest in other types of natural wonders. Seas and rivers are composed of rocks that flow like water; jewels decorate the landscape like flowers. Prester John briefly names the usual monstrous suspects, such as pygmies, cynocephali, Cyclopes, and elephants, as inhabitants of his realm.<sup>119</sup> However, they are overshadowed by a similarly impressive list of fabulous minerals, a fountain of youth, peppers, stones that grant invisibility, and an herb that wards off evil spirits, among other marvels. When Prester John depicts his subjects as wondrous, it is usually for the fastidiousness of their Christian faith, not their appearance. The land of Prester John is not primarily a frightening place full of monsters and pagan races, but rather a Utopia comprised of honorable men and topographical wonders that demonstrate nature's diversity.<sup>120</sup>

Although the texts of *Ieuan Vendigeit* and *Breudwyt Maxen* cannot conclusively be said to directly influence each other, striking similarities exist in the way both portray their respective landscapes as sites of extraordinary beauty and wealth. For example, Elen's hall in *Breudwyt Maxen* and Prester John's castle rival each other for their opulence and use of gemstones and precious metals. In his dream, Maxen finds Elen in a room *en eur oll* ("made entirely of gold"):

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<sup>119</sup> The exotic creatures and races that live in the land of Prester John appear in a long list towards the beginning of the letter. Due to the effect created by such enumeration, many readers may feel overwhelmed by the episode and, in turn, associate the letter exclusively with the list of strange men and beasts. However, it is important to remember that although the list has received both critical attention and a place in the shared Western imagination, it accounts for remarkably little of the letter. For instance, in Edwards's edition of the text, the list of marvelous men and beast totals only nine out of the text's 352 lines.

<sup>120</sup> For more on the medieval notion of Utopia, see Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity of in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15-24.

*Peithyneu e neuad a debygei eu bot en eur oll. Kant e neuad a debygei e vot en vaen gwerthuaur llewychedic, lloryeu e neuad a debygei e vot en eur coeth, lleithigeu eureit a debygei e uot endi a byrdeu arianneit...Ac e mon colovyn e neuad y guelei gur gwynllwyt en eisted mewn cadeir o agswrn eliphant a delu deu eryr arnei o rudeur.*

The roof tiles of the hall seemed to be entirely made of gold. The side of the hall seemed to be comprised of sparkling precious gemstones; the floors of the hall pure gold, with golden couches on it and silver tables...And at the base of the column in the hall, he saw a grey-haired man sitting in a chair of ivory with the image of two eagles made of red gold on it.

Compare Prester John's description of his own castle:

*Y rannev mwyhaf o'r neuad a henynt o'r mein a elwir sardonici yn gymysgedic a cerastes...Petheu ereill o'r neuad a henyw o'r llysseu a elwir hebenus. Y ffenestri a oedynt o vein cristal. Y byrdeu y uuytta arnunt yn yn llys ni rei ohonunt eur ynt ac ereill o vein gwerthuawr amestic. Yr ystyphyleu a gynneil y byrdeu o ascwrnn moruil ynt...yr ystafell y gorffwys yn goruchelder ni yndi a gyweirwyt o weith enrhwyfed a hynny o eur a phob ryw vein gwerthuawr o'r byt...*

The majority of the hall is made from a stone called sardonyx mixed with cerastis...Other parts of the hall are made from a plant called ebano. The windows are made of crystal. Some of the tables to eat on in our court are made of gold and other from the precious stone amethyst. The pillars that support the tables are made of whale bone...the room in which our highness rests is ornamented with wondrous work of gold and every time of precious gemstone in the world...

Both descriptions rely on the presence of metal, gemstones, and other natural resources to evoke awe from their readers as well as establish the majesty of the reigns of Elen in Britain and Prester John in India. Although the latter description mentions more gemstones by name and reflects more of the conventions of the lapidary genre,<sup>121</sup> the effect of both passages is identical. Here, Wales and India are indistinguishable: both are defined by their natural wonders and the awe they inspire in foreign observers.

In both the Letter of Prester John and *Breudwyt Maxen*, the marvelous landscape provides a space onto which outsiders can project their own dreams and identities. Michael Uebel has

<sup>121</sup> For example, the letter of Prester John often mentions the medicinal or magical healing powers of the stones listed. It remarks that the sardonyx prevents poison from coming into the hall, while the amethyst prevents people from becoming too drunk during meals. Although there is evidence that at least some awareness of the lapidary tradition existed among the Welsh during the Middle Ages, the first extant Welsh lapidary is dated to a sixteenth-century manuscript in the hand of Gruffudd Hiraethog. David Greene has suggested that it likely shares a source with several medieval English lapidary sources, including a Middle English translation of the Second Anglo-Norman lapidary, the Sloane lapidary, and the Peterborough lapidary. See Greene, "A Welsh Lapidary," *Celtica* 2.1 (1952): 96-116.

identified what he describes as the transformative power of Prester John's India held over Western self-identity during the Middle Ages. The landscape of India presented the West with a blank geographical slate on which Westerners could negotiate their own moral system. He writes: "Much of India's force as a neutral space derives from its special susceptibility to imaginative appropriation...Fully colonized by the imagination, India assumed a fictional reality that had an overall quiescent effect upon the tensions it embraced."<sup>122</sup> *Breudwyt Maxen* likewise presents a Wales "fully colonized by the imagination" of Maxen Wledic. The Wales of the text first appears as a wild and wondrous apparition that seems unattainable in the waking world. Yet the physical location of Caernarfon beyond the emperor's dreamscape does not disappoint, proving as marvelous as Maxen had imagined. The fertile soil and its vast natural resources reflect Maxen's own hopes for the future of the Roman Empire. Just as Prester John's India provided its European audience with a landscape in which it could reassess its own cultural and religious assumptions, Caernarfon provides a *tabula rasa* on which Maxen can refashion an orderly Roman Empire into a marvelous British one.

Of course, these similarities do not suggest that the Prester John legend served as a model for medieval Welsh representations of topographical wonder. However, they do indicate that the wonders of Britain could be expressed through the same vocabulary as the wonders of East. It should be of little surprise that the figures of both Prester John and Maxen appear frequently throughout Welsh bardic poetry through the early modern period as a symbols of wealth and power.<sup>123</sup> Both figures embody the potential for political autonomy to be found in marvelous

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<sup>122</sup> Uebel, 20.

<sup>123</sup> See Lloyd Williams, pp. lii-lix. Several notable late medieval *beirdd yr uchelwyr* refer to Prester John in their poetry, including Guto'r Glyn, Lewys Glyn Cothi, and Lewys Morgannwg. In general, they focus on Prester John's ownership of his land. Lewys Glyn Cothi claims that *Y tir y sydd i'r Pretre Siôn* ("the land belongs to Prester John"). Similarly, Lewis ab Edward describes him as *Preuter Siôn piau y tair sir* ("Prester John who owns the three kingdoms"). Other poets explicitly compare Wales to the land of Prester John, such as Huw Arwystl, who describes Cardiganshire as like *hen Droea, neu dir Ieuan* ("old Troy or the land of [Prester] John"). These references date from as early as the mid-fourteenth century in the poetry of Iolo Goch and continue through the early modern period. For example, the famous sixteenth-century *ymryson* (flying) between the humanist Edmwnd Prys and the bardic poet Wiliam Cynwal began in part over

landscapes. Prester John and his three Indias symbolized a strength based in cultural and geographic difference, which would have resonated strongly with Welsh authors and audiences who found similar strength in the alterity of Wales. Just as the Prester John legend calls into question the monstrosity of the men of the East, a characteristic that dominates all European geographic and ethnographic writing about India that came before it, so too does *Breudwyt Maxen* play with existing English and continental assumptions regarding the nature of the Welsh, turning imposing landscapes into awe-inducing spectacles.

#### NAVIGATING WONDER IN *HISTORIA PEREDUR VAB EFRAWG*

Whereas *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic* hints at elements of Eastern Romance found within the native British landscape, other Middle Welsh prose tales explicitly connect Wales to strange distant geographies. *Historia Peredur uab Efrog* (“The Story of Peredur son of Efrog”), for example, presents a landscape whose associations with the natural wonder of India and the imperial splendor of Constantinople permeate the text. Like *Breudwyt Maxen*, *Peredur* features a protagonist who travels through an increasingly marvelous Welsh landscape in order to find a wife and as well as win land and fame. Peredur, like Maxen, seeks out extraordinary people and objects that populate impressive and, at times, foreboding castles that arise from the landscape like mountains. However, while Maxen is a foreigner who has come to Wales in search of foretold wonders, Peredur is a native Briton who must learn to navigate a domestic space in which monsters and marvels are commonplace. Peredur’s journey is marked by his need to adapt

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Cynwal’s admiration for Prester John, which Prys dismisses as medieval nonsense. This point of contention spirals into a lengthy debate about the value of medieval versus humanist educational models. An interesting comparison is the treatment of John Mandeville in Welsh poetry. Like Prester John, the poets allude to Mandeville with some frequency, relying on him as a symbol of power and cosmopolitanism. The existence of Mandeville also features in the Cynwal-Prys debate. More on the early modern use of medieval figures from travel narrative can be found in Chapter Five of this dissertation.



to such wonders: only once he learns to negotiate this landscape does he achieve knighthood and eventually an imperial title.<sup>124</sup>

For scholars of Welsh narrative as well as scholars of Arthurian romance, *Peredur* presents a host of critical questions that reject an easy explanation. Unlike the other Welsh *rhamantau* that have clear relationships to their French analogs, *Peredur* varies wildly from its continental counterpart, Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*: although the first and final episodes of the Welsh tale correspond to the French romance, the central episode of *Peredur* exists independently from Chrétien's work.<sup>125</sup> This variance has fueled the debate on the relationship between the two tales and raised questions concerning both the Celtic origin of the French Arthurian material as well as the fluid nature of cultural exchange between Wales, France, and Norman England.<sup>126</sup> Because of the fractured nature of the tale, it is notoriously difficult to

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<sup>124</sup> Arguing for a unified meaning of *Peredur* is tricky scholarly business. The tale is notable for its tripartite episodic structure. The earliest redaction of the tale (Peniarth MS 7) ends with the second episode, while the later Red Book and White Book versions include the final section. Yet we cannot argue that the Peniarth 7 version is incomplete, as it ends definitely and with a formulaic ending common in Middle Welsh prose. In fact, the third section seems so removed from the second that they appear to be drawn from two independent narrative traditions associated with the same hero. This seeming disunity led Ian Lovecy to describe the tale as "a microcosm of almost all the problems which can be found in early Welsh prose literature" (171). John Bollard has suggested that the thematic similarity of the three episodes unifies the tale where its overall structure does not. Brynley Roberts and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan argue that we should consider the narrative structure on its own terms and those of its historical context: its rambling narrative is consistent with other medieval Welsh tales as well as contemporaneous continental romances. See Lovecy, "Historia *Peredur ab Efwarg*" in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, 171-82; Bollard, "Theme and Meaning in *Peredur*," *Arthuriana* 10.3 (2000): 73-92; Roberts, "*Peredur son of Efwarg*: A Text in Transition," *Arthuriana* 10.3 (2000): 57-92; Lloyd-Morgan, "Narrative Structure in *Peredur*," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 38 (1981): 197-231.

<sup>125</sup> For the text of *Perceval*, see Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, Trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>126</sup> The question of Celtic influence on Arthurian legend, also known as the *Mabinogionfrage*, characterized much of the scholarship concerning *y tair rhamant* (the three romances) until quite recently, and the debate still remains active in Welsh critical circles. Following the works of R.S. Loomis, critics sought to find mythological Celtic remnants in the texts of both the French and Welsh romances. In the case of *Peredur*, its editor Glenys Goetinck theorized that the tale originally told the story of a euhemerized Celtic sovereignty goddess. Mythological readings such as these have more recently been rejected by scholars such as Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, who has demonstrated the substantial influence of French romance on medieval Welsh literary culture. She, along with others such as Sioned Davies and Doris Edel, have suggested that *Peredur* embodies the literary meeting of continental romance with Welsh oral narrative. However, the post-colonial readings of Stephen Knight and, to a lesser extent Susan Aronstein, show that more nuanced, mythological interpretations still hold some critical appeal: both argue that *Peredur*

synthesize: multiple competing narratives seem to defy categorization, weaving together to create a rich, if troublesome tale. I would suggest, however, that *Peredur* can be understood as the hero's journey into a wondrous foreign landscape whose marvels become naturalized and domesticated as the hero learns how to approach them.

The tale begins with the death of Peredur's father and his six brothers, all of whom perish in battle. Peredur's mother, eager to avoid the same fate for her youngest son, steals him away into the wilderness, where he lives ignorant of the chivalric ethos despite displaying many traits that would render him exceptional for knighthood. Peredur's isolation from the larger Arthurian world is soon disrupted when he meets the renowned knights Owein and Gwalchmai, whom he mistakes for angels. Once he learns of the courtly world that exists outside of the forested refuge of his mother, he leaves her behind to seek fame for himself. What follows is a series of episodes that would be familiar to even the casual reader of romance: he meets his uncle who fosters him and teaches him appropriate chivalric behavior; he defends maidens from their oppressors; and he encounters extraordinary men and women, some of whom he must battle. These heroic deeds establish his reputation as a knight of Arthur's realm. In many ways, *Peredur* conforms to its generic expectations; yet for all its adherence to the standard tropes of monoheroic romance, there is something unusual about the tale. The world in which Peredur exists is often grotesque and exaggerated even for romance: at times, its profuse wonders overwhelm both the tale's hero and its readers.<sup>127</sup> Although the tale takes place in Britain, it is a Britain of the imagination, full of

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illustrates the struggle between Welsh "Celtic" modes of story-telling and the imposing Norman-French literary genre of romance. See Goetinck, *Peredur: a Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 304-17; Lloyd-Morgan, "Y Cyd-destun Ewropeaidd" in *Canhwyl Marchogion: Cyd-destunoli Peredur*, Eds. Sioned Davies and Peter Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 113-27; Davies, "Cynydd *Peredur vab Efrawc*" in *Canhwyl Marchogion*, 65-90; Edel, "The 'Mabinogionfrage': Arthurian Literature between Orality and Literacy" in *(Re)Oralisierung*, Ed. Hildegard L.C. Tristram (Narr: Tübingen, 1996), 311-34; Knight, "Resemblance and Menace: A Post-colonial Reading of *Peredur*" in *Canhwyl Marchogion*, 128-47; and Aronstein, "Becoming Welsh," 136-68.

<sup>127</sup> The tale is so exaggerated that, for example, Siân Echard has suggested that *Peredur* functions as a sort of literary parody of the romance genre, more closely related to the Middle Welsh Arthurian pastiche *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* than Chrétien's *Perceval*. This reading of *Peredur* corresponds to Lorraine Daston

stark terrains, pagan giants, and exotic empresses. Peredur's homeland evokes the landscapes of India and Africa found in travel narratives and geographies and at times explicitly highlights the similarities between them.

At first glance, the nature of the land in *Peredur* appears remarkably similar to the portrayal of Wales in *Breudwyt Maxen*: both texts emphasize the rugged nature of mountainous topography and the forested plains as well as the many enchanted fortresses that embellish the awe-inspiring natural terrain. As a child, Peredur is said to escape to *ynialwch a diffeithwch ac ymadaw a'r kyumanned* ("the wilderness and the wastelands, abandoning inhabited places").<sup>128</sup> He soon leaves behind his woodland home to join the knighthood of Arthur's realm, but he discovers the Arthurian sphere to be no more civilized than the wilderness in which he was raised. Peredur finds himself firmly entrenched in a milieu ostensibly characterized by an orderly chivalric ethos, yet the landscape of the courtly world is no less wild than the forests of his youth. Throughout the tale, Peredur must travel through dense woods, craggy peaks, and hauntingly barren lands. Even the homes of Arthur and Peredur's uncle, two figures closely associated with knighthood, are said to inhabit such spaces. For example, Peredur meets his uncle in *goet mawr ynial* ("a great desolate forest"). Similarly, he arrives at Arthur's court after days of traveling into the wastelands. The locations where Peredur must journey are consistently described as *diffeithwch* and *ynialwch* (along with their adjectival forms *diffeith* and *ynial*). These terms generally denote inhospitable natural areas and thus are usually translated as "wasteland," "wilderness," or "desert."<sup>129</sup> However, at times they also suggest an uncanny emptiness associated with the

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and Katharine Park's observation that the exaggerated quality of marvels in tales concerning the East not only delighted medieval readers, but also served as a vehicle for parody of their own societal structures and moral codes. Echard, "Of Parody and Perceval: Middle Welsh and Middle English Manipulations of the Perceval Story," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 40 (1996): 63-79.

<sup>128</sup> All quotations taken from Glenys Goetinck, ed., *Historia Peredur* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976).

<sup>129</sup> The presence of a wasteland could be the influence of the *Gaste Forest* of Chrétien's *Perceval*. The "waste forest" of the French tale is associated with the wounding of the Fisher King and the grail legend in later medieval sources. Some have noted parallels between the Fisher King and Peredur's wounded uncle.

marvelous, as in the Third Branch of the Mabinogi when all the men and animals of Arberth magically disappear after Manawydan and Rhiannon's wedding feast, leaving it a *diffeithwch*.<sup>130</sup> The term *anial* is even more ambivalent: its meanings include "wild," "desolate," and "desert," but also "monstrous" and "amazing."<sup>131</sup> As in *Breudwyt Maxen*, the Welsh topography of *Peredur* is somehow both stark and full of natural marvels awaiting the eager traveler.

However, while much of the Britain that Maxen and his men discover seems virtually unpopulated save for Beli in the south and Elen and the men of Gwynedd in the north, the Britain in which *Peredur* travels is replete with strange people and beasts that align it closely with other regions of great geographic, zoological, and human diversity. In his journeys, *Peredur* confronts witches, dwarves, and giants; he must also slay serpents, lions, and a lake monster,<sup>132</sup> which he defeats only through the use of a magical stone of invisibility. Many of the people and animals that *Peredur* encounters have clear counterparts in the accounts of the wonders of the East popular

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However, it should be noted that the term *diffeith* appears with some frequency in the description of Wales in *Mabinogion* texts (for example, when Owain has to travel through the *diffeithwch* to find the fountain) and in translations of geographical texts (such *Delw y Byd*, the translation of *Imago Mundi*, in which the lands bordering Ethiopia are described as *lleoed mawr diffeith* ["large desolate places"]). Alfred Siewers has recently drawn attention to the importance of desert imagery drawn from the writings of John Cassian and the other Desert Fathers to medieval Irish religious life (Ir. *disert*) and has suggested that this imagery shaped the ways by which the Irish conceptualized their own landscape (see Siewers, *Strange Beauty*, 10-20). Rather than representing waste and desolation, he claims that the desert became synonymous with hermitage and refuge throughout the British archipelago. Although it appears that *diffeith* generally has a more negative connotation than *disert*, both are frequently used to describe the native landscape. Further research would need to be done to establish the relationship between the Welsh concept *diffeith* and the Irish concept *disert*, but such a study could illuminate our understanding of both the Welsh and Irish geographical imaginations immensely.

<sup>130</sup> Ian Hughes, ed. *Manawydan uab Llyr: Trydedd Gainc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

<sup>131</sup> *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. "anial."

<sup>132</sup> In Welsh, *adanc llyn*. In Middle Welsh the term *adanc* (Mod. Welsh *afanc*) can refer to a generalized water monster, as it does here, or more specifically to a beaver, as it does in modern Welsh. Interestingly, Gerald of Wales notes that Wales is remarkable for its beaver population. He admires the creature's appearance and habits in both the *Itinerarium Cambriae* and the *Descriptio Cambriae* written three years later. These creatures would take on legendary status in Welsh folklore; by the sixteenth century, Welsh humanist David Powel felt the need to discredit such tales. He assures his readers that although the *afanc* is a remarkable creature, it is only a beaver and not a monster as some tales claimed. For more on *afancod* in medieval Welsh narrative, see Antone Minard, "Colorful Monsters: The *Afanc* in Medieval Welsh Narrative" in *Myth in Celtic Literatures*, 120-31.

at the time. Besides the aforementioned creatures Peredur battles, other British inhabitants of the text include a family of pagans whom the knight converts; black giants and crones; and even the Empress of Constantinople. In the section of the tale most closely associated with eastern romance, Peredur comes to the house of the *Du Trahawc* (The Black Oppressor), described as *wr du mawr vnlllygeityawc* (“a large, one-eyed black man”), who sends him on a quest that includes fighting a variety of monsters and ends with wedding the Empress of Constantinople. The world Peredur inhabits is so intimately tied to tales of travel and adventure in Asia that it can be easy to forget that its hero never leaves Britain.<sup>133</sup> Despite the recognizable foreignness of the land, Peredur never strays far from Arthur’s court in Caerllion in southwest Wales.<sup>134</sup>

This tension between the strangeness and the familiarity of the British landscape informs much of the action of *Peredur*. Three episodes in particular illuminate the conflict between exotic and domestic space that runs throughout the tale. The first and second episodes are closely related: they occur near the beginning and at the end of the tale in its long version, creating a frame narrative that highlights Peredur’s education as a knight. After he leaves his mother’s woodland home, Peredur initially fails to join Arthur’s retinue. Intent on proving himself a knight, he travels deeper into the *diffeithwch* until he reaches a lake beside a large fortress where people are fishing. By the lake, he meets an incapacitated elderly man whom he learns is his uncle. The man proceeds to instruct Peredur in swordplay and other skills that will prove vital to him as he reattempts his entry into Arthur’s court. Although Peredur’s mother had given him lessons on chivalry, his uncle advises him to forget all that his mother taught him:

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<sup>133</sup> Although one could argue that Peredur claims to leave his own land (*gwlad*) to seek a wife, I would suggest *gwlad* here refers to a region rather than an independent entity, as Peredur travels through a variety of *gwledydd* in Britain within the tale. The *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* counts “region” and “district” as possible meanings of the word. *GPC*, s.v. “gwlad.”

<sup>134</sup> So central is Caerllion to the tale that Brynley Roberts has suggested that its role “as the norm and the basis for the hero’s acceptability” unifies the three disparate sections of the text into a complete narrative. Roberts, “Text in Transition,” 66.

*Ymadaw weithon a ieith dy vam, a mi a uydafathro it ac a'th urdafyn varchawc urdawl. O hyn allan, llyna a wnelych: kyt gwelych a vot ryued genhyt, nac amofyn ymdanaw ony byd o wybot y venegi it.*

Now leave behind your mother's words. I will be your teacher, and I will raise you into a noble knight. From here on out, this is what you should do: if you see something that causes you wonder, do not ask about unless someone courteous explains it to you.

His education is interrupted when several young men arrive at court wailing, followed by two maidens carrying a severed and bloody head on a platter. His uncle, however, does not react to the carnage and, following the advice he received earlier, Peredur does not question the strange and horrible scene occurring before him. The episode ends as Peredur receives his uncle's permission to leave the castle and begin his journey to win fame and knighthood.

The final third of the extended version of the tale returns to this episode and handles the repercussions of Peredur's decision to remain silent when confronted with the severed head. By this point in the story, Peredur has established himself in Caerllion as a skillful swordsman under the protection of Arthur. The peace of the court is broken when a grotesque woman, described as having pitch-black sagging skin, flared nostrils, and mismatched green and black recessed eyes, appears before the knights and berates Peredur for refusing to question the bloody head he had witnessed long ago. She claims that had he inquired its cause, his crippled uncle would have regained his health. She then tells the men of a maiden who is trapped in a castle in a high mountain. Both Gwalchmai, a fellow knight, and Peredur respond to her admonitions: Gwalchmai decides to rescue the maiden, while Peredur realizes that he must discover the cause of the severed head. He embarks on a journey similar to the others he has taken over the course of the tale: he moves from fortress to fortress, fighting monstrous creatures and absorbing whatever information he receives from those willing to aid his quest. Notably, despite the advice of the black hag, he does not directly ask about either his uncle or the severed head. He is eventually instructed to find the Fortress of Wonders. Once he arrives there, he is confronted with what should be a strange sight: Gwalchmai sitting next to his uncle. Yet Peredur still does not inquire about his uncle's illness nor the head. Only after silently taking his seat next to the elderly man

does Peredur learn that the head belonged to a cousin slain by a group of witches. This knowledge propels Peredur into action: the story closes with Peredur and his fellow knights seeking vengeance for his cousin's decapitation and establishing himself as a hero of the realm. His uncle's advice proves itself wise: not once does he question the wondrous things he encounters; instead, he simply accepts these wonders as a natural part of his environment and waits for others to reveal to him any significance they might possess.

Peredur's meeting with and courtship of the Empress of Constantinople also exemplifies the knight's willingness to embrace the fabulous as an intrinsic feature of his world. On his way to fight the *adanc*, the knight meets a beautiful young maiden who stops him and warns that he will be unable to slay the monster without the aid of her magic. She places a stone of invisibility in his hand and promises that if he uses it, he will be victorious. However, she will only give him this magical stone on the condition that he loves her best of all the women in the world. Peredur agrees to her conditions without inquiring either how she learned of his burden or why she would endow him with such a valuable gift. He only asks where he can find her, to which she responds: *pan geissych ti viui, keis parth a'r India* ("when you search for me, look towards India"). In the end, his trust in the wondrous maiden is well placed: the stone allows him to easily defeat the *adanc*. Later in the tale, he learns that the Empress of Constantinople is holding a tournament, which he decides to join.<sup>135</sup> He falls madly in love with empress at first sight and quickly wins the tournament as well as the lady's hand. Once Peredur has demonstrated his bravery and skill in battle, the empress then reveals to the knight that she was the fair maiden who had given him the

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<sup>135</sup> The debate continues regarding the exact location of the empress's court. Natalia Petrovskaja has recently argued that the home of the empress (*Cristinobyl vawr*) should not be rendered "great Constantinople" as it is traditionally translated based on discrepancies between its form and the forms Constantinople often take in medieval Welsh translations of geographies and histories of the Near East. Instead, she proposes that it should be interpreted as "Great City of Christ," which she reads as Jerusalem based on the connection that Empress Matilda had with the city. I am not convinced that *Cristinobyl vawr* is as removed from other Middle Welsh forms of Constantinople as she suggests. Furthermore, I would argue that the precise location of the city is ultimately unimportant to the tale. Like India, *Cristinobyl vawr* serves more as a way to evoke the East and its wonder than it does any precise geography, especially considering that it is not clear that Peredur ever leaves the borders of Britain.

stone of invisibility and whom he had promised to love more than any other. As Peredur has not recognized her until this point, it is implied that she appeared in a different form earlier. Peredur keeps his promise to the empress, and the two of them rule together for fourteen years, thus tying the rule of Britain to the rule of Constantinople.

In each of these episodes, the marvelous nature of Britain and its people is highlighted, with the latter explicitly drawing connections between the island and far-flung eastern lands known for their imperial splendor (Constantinople) and their natural wonders (India). *Peredur* is a tale in which wonder is domesticated and incorporated into the world of Welsh romance and pseudohistory. In each of these episodes, Peredur's experience is defined by his ability to process the extraordinary things he witnesses and to accept them without question. Following his uncle's advice, he embraces the strange as an innate part of the courtly world: in the tale, the marvels of Britain are inherent to the land, and if Peredur is to successfully establish himself as a knight of the realm, they must cease to fascinate him. In his work on the concept of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov classifies wonder into the uncanny and the marvelous, which he positions as opposite reactions to extraordinary stimuli.<sup>136</sup> He defines the fantastic as existing solely in the ephemeral moment of hesitation when confronted with an object or event that seems to exist outside of known natural laws and phenomena. When faced by the fantastic object, two possible responses exist: one must seek to explain what he has seen either by examining it within the framework of scientific possibility (the uncanny); or by accepting that the supernatural exists outside of the realm of current human understanding (the marvelous). Todorov's theory illuminates Peredur's journeys: his acceptance of the unusual people and places he encounters facilitates his growth as a knight, which in turn increases his fame throughout the land and eventually brings him knighthood and an imperial title.

The tale presents Britain as a space of exceptional wonder; by embracing this aspect of

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<sup>136</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41-57.



the land, it highlights its marvels as an extraordinary asset rather than outward sign of the brutishness of its people. This acceptance of the wonders of the British landscape in *Peredur* contrasts sharply with decidedly anti-Welsh sentiments expressed in its French and English analogs. Both Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* and the anonymous *Sir Perceval of Galles* mock the young Welsh knight for his provincial customs. Furthermore, both texts present the Welsh woods as a liminal space in which the boundaries between beast and man disintegrate. Chrétien de Troyes suggests that Perceval's initial coarseness is due to his Welsh ethnicity, claiming that *Galois sont tuit par nature/ plus fol que bestes an pasture* ("all Welshmen are by nature madder than the animals in the field"). *Sir Perceval of Galles* likewise depicts the madness of the knight's mother as at least partially symptomatic of her rustic environment, describing her as a feral animal "wilde in the wodde" (ll. 2163).<sup>137</sup> Both texts clearly demonstrate the influence of the marginalizing discourse surrounding the Welsh prominent in English and Anglo-Norman literature. Conversely, *Peredur* reappropriates and reinterprets this same racialized discourse, presenting Wales as a transformative site of wonder comparable to the Far East. Throughout the tale, *Peredur* juxtaposes a rugged Welsh landscape with the grandeur of Eastern marvel.<sup>138</sup> Many of the descriptions of the wonders the knight encounters read like items in the lists of *mirabilia*

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<sup>137</sup> Mary Flowers Braswell, ed., *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

<sup>138</sup> Several postcolonial readings of the tale have suggested that implicit within *Peredur* exists a struggle between the ordered landscape of French romance and the magical milieu of the native Welsh tradition as represented by the *Mabinogi*. Building upon the work of Stephen Knight, Kristen Lee Over suggests that the tale privileges the vision of an Arthurian warrior band roaming the wilderness found in native Welsh tradition. Similarly, Susan Aronstein interprets the wondrous topography of Britain as "the liminal spaces associated with the Welsh otherworld—the desert, wilderness, and desolate forest—landscape that the English associated with outlaws and disorder in general and the Welsh in particular" (157). By highlighting these landscapes, the text extols the virtues of the land and redefines them as noble rather than savage in the context of the romance tradition. I agree that the tale exhibits the palpable influence of the native Welsh narrative tradition; however, I would complicate this argument by suggesting that the landscapes of Eastern romance equally influence the text. In the Red Book of Hergest and the White Book of Rhydderch, *Peredur* sits comfortably next to translations of geographies and other accounts of distant lands. We should not discount the potential influence of these continental traditions on the native tales. See Knight, "Resemblance and Menace"; Aronstein, "Becoming Welsh"; Kristen Lee Over, "Hybridity Reconsidered: Rewriting the Literary Welshman in *Historia Peredur vab Efraiw*" in *Other Nations: The Hybridization of Medieval Insular Mythology and Identity*, Eds. Wendy Hoofnagle and Wolfram R. Keller (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 109-26.

common in Eastern romance. For example, after he first meets the Empress of Constantinople, Peredur witnesses a remarkable tree by the river: *a'r neill hanher oed idaw yn llosci o'r gwreid hyt y vlaen a'r hanher arall a deil ir arnaw* ("one half of it was burning from the roots to the tip and the other half had verdant leaves on it"). Beside the tree he spies two flocks of sheep, one white and one black, that continually change their color. Although these types of marvels have parallels in native Welsh and Irish literature,<sup>139</sup> they can also be found in *mirabilia* lists as well as Eastern travel literature throughout the Middle Ages. Similar descriptions appear in the accounts of India found in *The Travels of John Mandeville* and *The Letter of Prester John*, both of which found a Welsh audience in the medieval period. Although it is unlikely that the marvels of *Peredur* are directly borrowed from these texts, the prevalence of identical marvels in the Welsh native materials and foreign translations speaks to the shared narrative tradition that located wonder on the earth's periphery.<sup>140</sup> *Peredur*, like *Breudwyt Maxen*, belongs to a distinct class of Welsh literature that places Wales on the edge of the civilized and inhabited world and then celebrates the sovereignty and exceptionalness that such a position conveys.

#### THE EASTERN GIANTS OF OWEIN AND YSTORYA BOWN DE HAMTWN

*Peredur* is in many ways emblematic of the Welsh *rhamant* tradition: throughout these tales, native and Eastern landscapes converge. They depict a Britain that is deeply foreign and yet deeply familiar, whose wonders speak to the marvelous history of the land. The union of these traditions is perhaps best expressed in the figures of the *gwŷr du mawr*, the black giants who

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<sup>139</sup> Aronstein, 162.

<sup>140</sup> In the case of *Mandeville*, *The Letter of Prester John*, and *Peredur*, any similarities can only speak to the shared tradition to which these texts belong. *Peredur* pre-dates *Mandeville* by approximately a century, and it is roughly contemporaneous with the letter attributed to Prester John. Furthermore, other insular examples of such marvels can be found in texts predating *Peredur* by at least two centuries. A close parallel to the sheep Peredur sees appears in the Old Irish tale *Immram Maele Dúin* ("The Voyage of Máel Dúin"), dated to around the turn of the first millennium. However, I believe that it would be equally incorrect to attribute these marvels to a shared Celtic source based on this analogue. These types of marvels belong to a tradition to that dates back to ancient Greek ethnographic texts. Their popularity throughout medieval Europe can be attributed to early encyclopedic works, in particular Isidore of Seville's widely disseminated *Etymologiae*. I would not claim that *Peredur* and other Welsh tales are direct products of the medieval travel narrative; instead, I argue that they share generic conventions that derive from the same source.

appear in a handful of Middle Welsh prose tales. In *Peredur*, the *Du Trahawc*, a black giant cyclops, challenges the knight to battles with a variety of monsters. Other *gwŷr du mawr* (“large black men”) appear in tales such as *Owein* and *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn* to help the hero along his quest. Sioned Davies renders these figures as ‘black-haired men’ rather than ‘black-skinned men’ in her translation of the *Mabinogion*; yet I would argue that given the appearance of Eastern Romance and geography in contemporary Welsh manuscripts, it is likely that the term evokes black giant figures that appear in classical ethnography and geography.<sup>141</sup> These characters embody a uniquely Welsh appropriation of Eastern monsters: their appearance is grotesque, and yet like the giants of the *Mabinogion*, they display a full range of human emotions and motives. Their bodies represent the erasure of the boundaries between East and West, and their existence in the Welsh landscape reiterates the wonders to be found there. Just as Welsh authors relied on Eastern geographies to problematize dominant English narratives concerning the nature of the Welsh landscape, so too did these authors transform Eastern giants into Welsh wonders.

Just as characters such as Bendigeidfran and Ysbaddaden highlight the ambiguity of heroic categories, the *gwŷr du mawr* of Welsh romance complicate the division between humanity and monstrosity. In *Owein*, for example, the black giants of Britain initially disrupt the chivalric landscape before revealing themselves to be invaluable allies to Arthur’s knights. As in *Peredur*, it is only once the hero accepts these frightful figures as part of the natural environment that he flourishes in his quest. The tale begins as Arthur’s retinue challenge each other to tell *o’r*

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<sup>141</sup> In her translation of the text, Sioned Davies has suggested that we interpret these characters as ‘black-haired men’ rather than ‘black-skinned men’ based on a similar pattern in Irish narrative and notes parallels between these characters and the Celtic god Cernunnos. I, however, am not convinced that it makes more sense that the character would refer to a centuries old continental Celtic deity than a figure common in romance as well as popular geography. Furthermore, given the nods to eastern *mirabilia* in the romances as well as specific references to India and Constantinople in the case of *Peredur*, it seems more likely to me that the *du* here refers to skin color rather than hair color. This becomes even more clear when we consider these *gwŷr du* in light of the black lady who appears in the last third of *Peredur*, who is unmistakably black-skinned: *duach oed y hwyneb a’e dwylaw no’r hayarn duhaf* (“her face and hands were blacker than the blackest iron”). Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

*hynn odidockaf a wypach* “the most wondrous thing [i.e. story] that you know” (l. 29).<sup>142</sup> Cynon proceeds to narrate an excursion he made as a young man to *eithauoed byt a diffeithwch* (“the most remote and desolate [regions] of the world”). Although Cynon’s description at first appears to be of an exotic distant land, it soon becomes clear that his travels never take him outside the boundaries of Arthur’s British realm. On his quest, he encounters a fantastic castle reminiscent of those found in *Breudwyt Macsen*, *Peredur*, and *Ystorya Iuean Vendigeit*. Within the castle, he finds ivory weapons, exceedingly beautiful maidens, remarkable wildlife, a magical fountain, and innumerable other treasures. The castle and the surrounding grounds are kept by an equally marvelous guardian, a one-eyed giant black forester whose disarming appearance epitomizes the uncanny character of the landscape. This giant protects a magical fountain that allows those who touch it to control the natural elements. Cynon is frightened by this man and fails to successfully navigate their encounter. Communication between the giant and the knight swiftly deteriorates, which results in a battle. Cynon is readily defeated and sent back to the domestic space of Arthur’s court.

Throughout his tale, Cynon emphasizes the strangeness of the land in which he traveled, designating the world of the giant as fundamentally different from the Arthurian court. The luxury of the castle, the grotesqueness of the forester, and the overabundance of the wildlife combine to present an exotic landscape not far from the orientalist vision of the letter of Prester John. As the tale progresses, however, the division between the centralized domesticity of Arthurian Britain and the marvelous, peripheral space of the giant is quickly undermined. As Cynon concludes his tale, he remarks:

*A Duw a wyr, Gei, nat adeuawd dyn arnaw e hun chwedyl vethedigach no hwnn eiryoet; ac eisoes rac odidocket gennyf i na chiglef eirmoet na chynt nac gwedy a wypei dim y wrth y chwedyl hwnn namyn hynny y dywedeis, a bot defnyd y chwedyl hwnn yg kyfoeth yr amherawdyr Arthur heb dywanu neb arnaw*

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<sup>142</sup> R.L. Thompson, ed., *Owein or Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnwawn* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1986).

And God knows, Cai, that no man has ever confessed a story of greater failure than this; but I find it so strange that I have never heard of anyone, before or since, who knows anything about this story (apart from what I have recounted), and that it should be located in the kingdom of the emperor Arthur without anyone else coming across it. (ll. 211-18)

Cynon's lust for adventure does not take him outside of Britain: the extraordinary forest with its wild and monstrous inhabitants belongs to the same realm as the cultured Arthurian court.

Moreover, Cynon's surprise at its lack of discovery by his fellow knights suggests that the forest isn't as remote as his description indicates. The proximity of the court and the forest is confirmed later in the tale as figures from both worlds intermix: Owein and Arthur easily retrace Cynon's travels, and various figures from the remote woodland kingdom appear before the king in Caerllion.

The fluent exchange that takes place between the marvelous world of the forest and the world of the court is most clearly embodied by the figure of the *gŵr du*. The giant black forester challenges divisions between the human and the monstrous and exposes them as socially constructed. The initial description of the *gŵr du* conforms to stereotypical depictions of giants as cruel, unthinking creatures whose existence speaks to a violent and barbarous past. The host tells Cynon:

*gwr du mawr a wely ym penn yr orssed ny bo llei no deuwr o wyr y byt hwn; ac vn troet yssyd idaw, ac vn llygat yg knewillyn y tal; a ffon yssyd idaw o hayarn, a diheu yw ytti nat oes deuwr yn y byt ny chaffo eu llwyth yn y ffon*

On the top of the hill, you will see a large black man no smaller than two men of this world; and he has one foot and one eye in the middle of his forehead; and he has an iron club, which I assure you would take the strength of two men of this world to lift. (ll. 108-11)

From his single eye to his black skin, the giant appears at first to be a picture of savagery taken straight from the classical ethnographic tradition. His club in particular evokes images of uncivilized races originally associated with giants that persist in modern iconography of prehistoric as well as pre-industrialized peoples. John Block Friedman has shown that by the twelfth century, portraits of giants typically included clubs, which signified "a resemblance

between the representative of a monstrous race and the rustic or the churl.”<sup>143</sup> He further notes that Saracens, Blemmyae, and devils were also depicted wielding clubs, as was Cain in at least one manuscript illustration.<sup>144</sup> The giant’s fierce appearance marks him as dangerous, and his connection to the land, especially his ability to communicate with the wild animals in the woods, highlight his primitive state. That he disregards Cynon’s status as a knight, insulting and mocking him for being a small man, shows his ignorance of and antipathy towards courtly culture and its civilizing impulses.

In his first appearance in the text, the giant forester seems patterned on the monstrous races found throughout classical and early medieval geographic and historical accounts. However, the giant’s actions quickly challenge these assumptions, problematizing any attempts to draw conclusions regarding his humanity based on his gruesome appearance. Though Cynon recoils at the giant’s appearance, he is assured that *nyt gwr anhygar efo: gwr hagyr yw ynteu* (“he’s not an unpleasant man, but he is ugly”) (ll. 111-12).<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, despite the giant’s rudeness towards Cynon, he poses no physical threat towards the knight and ultimately assists him in his quest for adventure. Cynon tells Owein and Cai:

*garw uu ynteu wrthyf i, ac eissoes gouyn a oruc ef y imi pa le y mynnwn vynet. A dywedut a wneuthum idaw pa ryw wr oedwn a ffa beth a geisswn. A menegi a oruc ynteu y mi*

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<sup>143</sup> Friedman, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>145</sup> It is worth noting that there is no equivalent for this line in Chrétien’s *Yvain*. In fact, the French text claims that the forester’s appearance is so hideous that “no word of mouth would do him justice.” Without delving into the debate regarding the relationship between Chrétien’s romances and the Welsh *rhamantau*, I would argue that in this particular instance, the Welsh text humanizes the forester in a way the French romance (which compares the giant to an elephant, a horse, an owl, a wolf, a boar, and a cat) does not. This humanizing tendency can possibly be detected in the absence of the word *cawr* (“giant”) throughout the text. Although his physical description clearly matches classical and medieval descriptions of giants, he (along with the other black giants of Welsh romance) is consistently referred to as *gŵr du* (“a black man”), with *gŵr* unambiguously classifying him as human rather than beast. A native analogue can be seen in the treatment of Bendigeidfran, who can easily be interpreted as a giant figure yet is never given the epithet *cawr*. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

He was rude to me, but nevertheless he asked me where I wanted to go. I told him what kind of man I was and what I was looking for, and he showed me. (ll. 140-43)

Although the giant purposefully intimidates Cynon, deriding him as a *dyn bychan* ("little man"), he ultimately proves to be a valuable resource for the young knight. He provides an extensive explanation of the powers of the fountain and warns Cynon of the trouble he will face with the black knight who guards it. The forester does not entirely reject the social order established at court; instead, he recognizes Cynon's status as a knight, albeit a young and overly confident one in need of a humbling experience. When Cynon slinks back to the clearing after his unceremonious defeat by the knight of the fountain, the giant teases him for his futile attempts at fame and sends him on his way back home.

When Owein recreates Cynon's journey later in the text, the discrepancy between the giant's appearance and his behavior is further emphasized. Upon first glance, Owein is startled by the giant's size, remarking that he is larger than Cynon had reported him; yet the *gŵr du* proves to be even less of a threat to the titular knight. When asked about the fountain, the giant simply gives the information Owein requests. Whatever implicit violence lurked in his taunts towards Cynon is entirely non-existent in his interaction with Owein. Unlike his earlier encounter with Cynon, in this episode the giant is neither discourteous nor menacing. His respectful treatment of Owein is perhaps due to his understanding of the social strata of courtly society. Whereas Cynon's youth and impetuosity led the giant to ridicule him, the giant's courteousness towards Owein could reflect his awareness of the latter's status as a more established and respected member of Arthur's retinue. Notably, when Arthur meets the giant himself midway through the tale, he receives the same respectful treatment as Owein. The giant's monstrous visage indicates that he will present a challenge to the knights, attempting to thwart their quest for fame and adventure; in reality, he proves to be a valuable contact for Owein, Arthur, and even Cynon. Just as the marvelous wilderness he rules ends up assimilated into the

British landscape, the black forester reveals that the boundary between monster and hero can be equally fraught.

From Bendigeidfran to Ysbaddaden to the black forester of *Owein*, the giants of Welsh narrative reveal the difficult position this figure plays in the medieval imagination: unlike the purely violent giants of the Galfridian historical tradition, these giants function within the chivalric order, albeit on its margins. They demonstrate the capacity and desire to engage in the rites of the courtly world, whether through participating in tournaments or providing guidance to knights on a quest. Their appearance in Middle Welsh prose tales transform Britain into an otherworldly, hybridized space in which native heroes fight alongside monsters from Eastern geographical lore. The integration of giants into the British landscape plays an important role not only in many of the Welsh romances, but also the foreign tales that the Welsh *literati* chose to translate into their own language. Perhaps nowhere is this desire for assimilation of the marvelous and the mundane more clear than in *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn*, a thirteenth-century Welsh adaptation of the late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman romance *Geste de Boeve de Haumtone*.<sup>146</sup> The tale found widespread popularity throughout most of Europe, with translations existing in languages as varied as Icelandic and Russian, English and Yiddish. While the only extant Middle Welsh copies survive in the Red Book and the White Book, it continued to be copied well into the late sixteenth century: for example, it appears alongside Siôn Dafydd Rhys's *defensio* of giants of Wales in NLW Peniarth MS 118, a text discussed in great detail later in this dissertation. *Bown*'s long-lasting popularity in early modern manuscript anthologies, combined with the multiple

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<sup>146</sup> Until the recent work of Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, little attention has been paid to this text. In his diplomatic edition, Morgan Watkin tentatively dates the translation to the mid-thirteenth century, a date which Poppe and Reck have supported. This date situates the tale as part of thirteenth-century influx of French-language literature into Wales, alongside the Ps.-Turpin Chronicle, *The Romance of Otfel*, and *The Song of Roland*. See Poppe and Reck, *Selections from Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), xiii.



references to the eponymous knight in Welsh bardic poetry,<sup>147</sup> suggests a greater awareness of the tale than its scant medieval manuscript evidence indicates.<sup>148</sup>

*Ystorya Bown* clearly demonstrates the ease with which elements from Eastern Romance could assimilate with native insular traditions. The titular hero, as an English exile in Egypt, is a hybrid figure whose own cultural and ethnic identity remains fluid throughout the text. Much attention has been paid to the ways in which the text constructs Christian English identity in opposition to North African Islam.<sup>149</sup> However, I would argue that the tale ultimately rejects rigid societal divisions between Britain and the East. *Ystorya Bown* presents a British origin story in which insular identity is fully integrated with Eastern wonder. The author subtly positions Bown as a Brutus-like figure whose arrival on British shores establishes proper Christian order throughout the land; unlike Brutus, however, Bown does not find a race of hostile indigenous giants awaiting him. Instead, Bown befriends a Saracen giant named Copart with whom he reconquers the island. Unlike the *gwŷr du mawr* of *Owein* and *Peredur* whose frightening appearances conceal their indigenous status, Copart is unambiguously foreign: his black skin, Saracen religion, and monstrous size mark him as an utterly alien presence within the confines of the English society to which Bown belongs. Despite his alterity, Copart earns the trust of the hero and becomes one of his closest companions, aiding his quest to regain his patrimony. Siobhan Bly

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<sup>147</sup> Erich Poppe, "Beues of Hamtoun in Welsh Bardic Poetry," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 43 (2002): 49-58.

<sup>148</sup> The figure of Bevis shares a common fate with other English heroes within Wales. Although *Bown* is the only extant example of English romance in Middle Welsh, late medieval poetic evidence suggests that stories concerning other English heroes such as Guy of Warwick, Fouke le Fitzwaryn, and John Mandeville were either read in English or transmitted orally. For more on the Mandeville tradition in Wales, see Chapter Five of this dissertation. For a more general discussion on the exchange between Welsh and English literatures in the Middle Ages, see Helen Fulton, "Literature of the Welsh Gentry: Uses of the Vernacular in Medieval Wales" in *Vernacularity in England and Wales, c. 1300-1550*, Eds. Elizabeth Salter and Helen Wicker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 199-223.

<sup>149</sup> For a discussion on the construction of Englishness in the text, see Robert Allen Rouse, "For King and Country?: The Tension between National and Regional Identities in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*" in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, Eds. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjevic (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 114-126.

Calkin has argued that the romance “defines a model of heroic action to counteract assimilation and re-establish the borders between Christianity and Saraceness.”<sup>150</sup> While the tale speaks towards the anxiety present in Christian and non-Christian contact, I would argue that the relationship between the Christian hero and his monstrous Saracen companion in the Welsh translation transcends the text’s fear of cultural and religious contamination. Bown and Copart’s friendship follows a pattern seen in other Welsh tales and translations that incorporate the wonderful and strange into British heroic history.

Throughout the entirety of the text, boundaries between Britain and the East are challenged and eroded. The tale begins as Bown’s wicked mother and stepfather murder his father. After publically renouncing his mother for her sins, Bown is exiled to Egypt, where he is adopted by its Saracen king. Although Bown refuses to convert to Islam, he wins the favor of the king and the hand of his beautiful daughter Josian who converts to Christianity so that they might be wed. The attention he receives as a Christian in a Muslim court draws the jealousy of his fellow knights who plot to overthrow him, eventually convincing the king to have him sent to Syria to be executed. Bown escapes from Syria unharmed and eventually returns to Josian. They flee Egypt together and return to Hampton to reclaim Bown’s land. After a series of extraordinary battles and travails, Bown regains his patrimony and establishes his eldest son as King of England. Bown returns to Egypt where another son, Gi, has been made king. Here he lives out the rest of his days until he and Josian die in each other’s arms. Throughout the narrative, Bown must navigate the unstable boundaries that exist between Muslim and Christian societies. Although he is betrayed by many Egyptians who resent his Englishness and his unwillingness to convert to Islam, he is equally betrayed by English, Scottish, and German Christians, some of whom are his closest relatives. Conversely, his Saracen wife and his half-Saracen sons are among his closest allies. The text problematizes the racial and ethnic divisions that characterize Eastern romance,

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<sup>150</sup> Calkin, “The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange: Saracens and Christian Heroism in *Sir Bevis of Hamtoun*,” *Florilegium* 21 (2004): 136.

suggesting a certain flexibility regarding these traditional divisions. Indeed, it is telling that after decades of hardship to regain his ancestral property in Hampton, Bown immediately chooses to return to his adopted homeland of Egypt.<sup>151</sup>

Bown ultimately proves to be a hybrid figure who surrounds himself with other hybrid figures like his convert wife and their Anglo-Egyptian sons. His relationship with the giant Copart demonstrates the text's willingness to complicate the categories not only of Christian and Muslim, but also human and monster. Bown and Josian meet Copart during their flight from Egypt. Like the *gwŷr du mawr* of the Welsh romances, Copart's monstrous appearance masks his humanity. He is described as:

*dyn ryw aniueil gobraff y veint ar nys gwelsei eiroet y gyffelib. A ffon hayarn  
braff oed yn y law, ac ny allei degwŷr cryf y dwyn un cam rac y thrymet. Ar y  
ystyls yd oed yspodyl drom vnuiniawc. Y rwg y deu lygat yd oed teir troetued  
ehalaeth a thal mawr amhyl, a duach oed no'r muchyd. A thrwyn praff-froenuoll  
oed idaw a choesseu hir-lymyon yscyrnic. Gwallt y ben oed vegys rawn meirych  
gre. Y lygeit oedynt gymeint a'r dwy sawsser vwyaf ry welsei neb erioet. Hwyl oed  
y ddannedd noc ysgithred y baed coet hwyaf y ygithred, a geneu gobraf oed idaw.  
A ffan dywetti dan agori y safyn vegys hen ellgi bwn, aneglur agharueid y  
dwedei.*

a man as large as a very big animal, whose like he [Bown] had never seen before. He had a large iron club in his hand, which ten strong men could not have carried one step on account of its weight. At his side he carried a heavy single-edged sword. Between his eyes were three full feet. He had a large, wide forehead, and he was blacker than jet. He had flared nostrils and long, thin, and bony legs. The hair on his head was like the coarse hair of a studhorse. His eyes were as big as the two biggest saucers that anyone had ever seen. His teeth were longer than the tusks of a boar with longest tusks, and his mouth was very large; and when he spoke, he opened his mouth like an old hound and uttered an indistinct unpleasant sound. (ll. 559-69)<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Kofi Campbell has observed that while Bevis/Bown ultimately adopts Josian's land his own, his disregard towards the Saracen's religion and customs suggests he embraces his Eastern home only in so far as it can be remade as an English imperial state. While it is true that Bown often insults the Egyptians, I would argue that the ascendancy of Gi to the Egyptian throne signifies more of a hybridization of Christian and Saracen culture than complete English hegemony. See Campbell, "Nation-building Colonialist Style in *Bevis of Hampton*," *Exemplaria* 18.1 (2006): 205-232.

<sup>152</sup> For the sake of consistency and clarity, I am referring to the line numbers in Poppe and Recks's recent edition of selections from *Bown*. However, this edition only contains approximately 40% of the original text. For the full tale, see Morgan Watkin's diplomatic edition of the White Book text, which the Poppe and Reck edition cross-references. Watkins, *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958).

Even more than the other Welsh *gwyŷr du*, Copart is bestialized: animal imagery overwhelms this description. Moreover, the animals to which he is compared are far from the powerful and majestic animals of geographies and bestiaries, such as lions and elephants. Instead, Copart's slavish nature is emphasized in his comparison to domestic animals. While the comparison to a boar signifies Copart's physical strength, references to studhorses and hounds dehumanize Copart entirely. The giant's actions seem to reinforce this perception. Immediately upon encountering Bown and Josian, Copart attacks the knight and is swiftly struck down. Josian begs Bown to show mercy upon Copart and convert him to Christianity, which Bown rejects on the basis of Copart's bestial nature, assuming him to be too primitive to accept salvation.

Copart then shocks Bown by not only accepting Josian's proposal, but also by offering to serve Bown as his squire on the quest for his patrimony. The giant's indecipherable animalistic grunts transform into clear human speech as he promises his faith and fealty to Bown and Josian. His conversion to Christianity is marked with difficulty and made under duress. He is reluctant to renounce Islam, and he mistakes his baptism as the bishop's attempts to drown him. Despite these difficulties, however, his conversion is no more problematic than that of Josian, who converts not due to any religious sentiment but to Bown's threats to abandon her if she does not. Nevertheless, Copart remakes himself into the image of the Christian knight and befriends both Bown and Josian. Like Bown, Copart is an exile from his own land, and his narrative arc parallels that of the Englishman.<sup>153</sup> Copart's actions amount to more than coarse mimicry: his acceptance as a squire allows for the integration of the giant body into the British chivalric tradition. For example, when Josian is imprisoned by a German nobleman, Copart becomes a surrogate for Bown, rescuing her from peril when Bown cannot. Furthermore, it is Copart, not Bown, who finally defeats Bown's stepfather and sends him to his death in a vat of hot lead.

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<sup>153</sup> Cohen, *Of Giants*, 173.

Although the text emphasizes the strong connection between Bown and Copart, the giant ultimately betrays the knight, returning to Egypt and leading a Saracen army to kidnap Josian and her infant sons. Earlier in the tale, Bown unceremoniously replaces Copart with another squire, and it is possible that this act of disloyalty impels Copart's otherwise inexplicable betrayal of his closest companions. Furthermore, as Melissa Furrow has suggested, it is possible that Copart's betrayal is an interpolation by a secondary author who sought to align Copart's otherwise benign character with the generally monstrous depictions of giants prevalent in French romance.<sup>154</sup> The original text, she argues, likely ended with a victorious Copart slaying Bown's stepfather and regaining his friend's patrimony. Certainly, this ending corresponds more closely to the consistent characterization of Copart as a rough, but kind and loyal attendant. Whether Copart's betrayal is original to the earliest versions of the tale or not, he is emblematic of the text's complicated depiction of foreignness and monstrosity. Despite his monstrous appearance and eventual treachery, Copart repeatedly displays his humanity, signifying a stark contrast between appearance and substance.

Moreover, the tale's popularity within Wales is indicative of a general Welsh interest in morally ambiguous and narratively problematic giants who challenge conventional taxonomies of the monstrous and the human. Copart and his fellow *gwyŷr du mawr* demonstrate the tendency of Welsh narrative to humanize the giants of British history. These figures are often rehabilitated and incorporated into Welsh traditions, populating a marvelous British landscape alongside the marvelous men of native lore. They reclaim the racialized discourse surround the Welsh people, infusing it with the language of Eastern marvel and indigenous narrative in which the monstrous is humanized and the wondrous, naturalized. These tales reveal an interest in giants not only as marginal members of society that contrast against civilized society, but as heroes in their own right, serving as agents of culture in the origin legends of the Welsh.

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<sup>154</sup> Furrow, "Ascopard's Betrayal: A Narrative Problem" in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, 145-60.

## CONCLUSION

Although some of this literature certainly predates the Anglo-Norman period, the forms in which we have these tales rely upon many of the same orientalist and racialized traditions with which Anglo-Norman authors could position Wales as barbarous. In the hands of Welsh authors and translators, however, topographical and anthropological wonders are upheld as evidence not of aberrance, but ultimately of virtue. The origins and transmission histories of these aforementioned Welsh tales vary greatly, yet their treatment of wonder unites them. In each of these texts, the native landscape teems with marvels, some of which have clear parallels in orientalist literature of the period. While some of these marvels retain elements of their negative connotations in contemporaneous English and European literatures, they are overwhelming depicted as a natural, and at times beneficent, reality of life in Britain in these texts. Furthermore, even the most maligned wonders like the black giants of romance are complicated by this literature in often unexpected ways that challenge assumed divisions between the mundane and the sublime. The exotic landscapes of the texts are also domestic lived spaces and their monsters, functional members of society. These texts blend the outlandish and familiar and, in doing so, domesticate wonder as an intrinsically Welsh feature. Here palaces of Indian imperial splendor become normalized features of the Gwynedd coast; giants act not only in the capacity of challengers to Arthurian hegemony, but also as heads of state.

This multivalent approach to wonder found throughout the medieval corpus had a deep and lasting impact on the literary heritage of Wales, shaping narratives of national identity well beyond the Middle Ages. These medieval texts established a shared vocabulary to discuss alterity during other periods marked by the threat of cultural loss in the face of external political pressure. For example, the late sixteenth-century unification efforts of the Tudors and Stuarts saw the greatest erosion of the hopes for an autonomous Wales since perhaps the Edwardian conquest of the thirteenth century. During this period, medieval tales of wonder found a new audience in the humanists and antiquarians who appealed to them in their defense of Welsh identity. Geographic

*mirabilia* and giant lore were particularly popular; these scholars promoted Wales's connection to a mythical, outsized past as an asset that preserved its unique character and safeguarded it against complete incorporation into a newly conceived Anglo-British state. Like their medieval counterparts, these authors draw striking parallels between Wales and other peripheral spaces, blurring divisions between East and West in their writings. They are deeply influenced not only by the tradition of the Wonders of the East, but also by contemporaneous tales coming from the Americas. In the rest of this dissertation, I will show how medieval conceptions of British wonder shaped much of the discourse surrounding the role Wales was to play in the governance and cultural life of Tudor Britain.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
***OLION CEWRI: GALFRIDIAN HISTORY AND EARLY MODERN WELSH IDENTITY***

In 1552, Elis Gruffydd, a Welshman turned English soldier who spent much of his life in Calais, published his lengthy *Cronicl Chwech Oes y Byd* (*The Chronicle of the Six Ages of the World*), which narrates the history of man from the beginning of time until the reign of Henry VIII. His writing demonstrates his erudition and exhibits a clear understanding of contemporary political and cultural issues. *Cronicl Chwech Oes y Byd* is equal parts chronicle, memoir, and folklore compendium: Elis deftly incorporates legendary Welsh tales as well as stories drawn from his personal experience as a Tudor soldier into the framework of universal history.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the text, he juxtaposes Welsh oral and folk material with his written historical sources, occasionally privileging the former over the latter when they contradict. Like many of his contemporaries, Elis also expresses a deep interest in the accuracy of Galfridian history and its role in the development of a Welsh national historiography; his chronicle weaves Welsh, English, Latin, and French sources to defend the reputation of the Welsh pseudohistorical tradition in the face of English and continental attacks against its veracity.<sup>2</sup> However, he does not defend the tradition blindly. Jerry Hunter has suggested that Elis positions himself as a *canolwr diwylliannol* (“cultural middleman”) between the medieval chronicle tradition and modern humanist scholarship who willingly exposes the logical inconsistencies in the Galfridian legend.<sup>3</sup> His competing desires to defend medieval Welsh history (and thus Welsh identity) and to engage in contemporaneous historical debates often collide, resulting in a polysemous and, at times, conflicted text.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief history of Elis and his chronicle, see Thomas Jones, “A Welsh Chronicler in Tudor England,” *Welsh History Review* 1.1 (1960): 1-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, “Portread Elis Gruffydd o’r Brenin Arthur” in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* XXIII, Ed. J.E. Caerwyn Williams (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1997), 118-133.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Hunter, *Sofffestri’r Saeson*, 23.



This tension clearly informs the section of Elis's chronicle usually entitled *Ystori'r Llong Foel*, or "The Story of the Barren Ship," which is an imaginative retelling of the legend of Albina and her giant offspring found in the Anglo-Latin "De origine gigantium."<sup>4</sup> Although he includes the narrative in his chronicle, Elis equivocates with regard to its truthfulness, calling this origin story into question and hinting at alternative histories regarding the foundation of Britain:

*Ac o ddechreuad preswylua yr ynys hon J mae llaweroedd o ymraualion oppiniwns a dwediadau hryuedd. Achos hrai a ddengys mae'r ail henw a vu ar yr ynys yma vu Albion, a'r hennw nesa ar y uu arnai hi yn ol hynny vu Ynys y Keuri ne ynys Brydain Vawr, ac yn ol hynny Lloegyr. J mae yn ysbyys J bob darlleawdyr o bob vn o'r ddwy Jaith, megis ac J mae kronick o Gymraeg ac o Sayssonaeg yn dangos yn ddiymrauel, vod J wr a elwid Diackleshian, yr hwn, megis ac J mae'r ysdori yma yn dangos, ydoedd yn vrenhin o Syria, ddeudeg ar hugain o ferched, y rhain oll, megis ac J mae yr ysdori yn dangos, a brioded ynn yr un dydd a deuddeg ar hugain o vrenhinoedd*

And concerning the beginning of the inhabitation of this island, there are many diverse opinions and wondrous stories. Some say that the second name of the island was Albion, and its next name after that was the Island of the Giants or the Island of Great Britain, and after that, England. It is clear to every reader of both languages, as the Welsh and English chronicles uniformly show, that there was a man named Diocletian who (as the story goes) was king of Syria and had thirty-two daughters, all of whom (as the story goes) were married on the same day to thirty-two kings.<sup>5</sup>

The story continues as follows: after their wedding, the thirty-two sisters murder their husbands and are placed in a barren ship stripped of its sails and rudders. They are exiled and left to drift at sea until they reach the island of Britain. Once they arrive at the as-yet unpopulated island, they christen their new homeland Albion after the eldest sister. Their peace does not last long: they are promptly seduced by a group of native incubi who impregnate them with a race of giants. These giants become the indigenous population of Albion and rule it until Brutus, the legendary Trojan progenitor of the Britons, eradicates them upon his own arrival to the land. Elis rejects much of this story as unbelievable; he consistently draws attention to the outlandish elements of the tale

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<sup>4</sup>An edition of Elis's version of the tale can be found, along with two other sixteenth-century Welsh redactions in Brynley Roberts, "Ystori'r Llong Foel," *Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies* 18.4 (1960): 337-62. Roberts labels Elis's redaction Version C.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 357. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

and distances himself from them with his persistent interjection *megis J mae'r ysdori yn dangos* (“as the story goes”). He claims to doubt the legend of Albina and her sisters for several reasons, some more compelling than others. He expresses skepticism that the women would not have encountered inhabited land before they reached Britain. He also notes the unlikelihood that one king would have produced so many wicked daughters. Elis ultimately concludes that the name Albion likely derives from the Latin name for the White Cliffs of Dover that Roman visitors would have seen as they approached the island, and he cites the corresponding ancient Welsh name *yr Wen Ynys* (“the White Island”) as further proof for this theory.

In this section of the text, Elis’s own incredulity closely mirrors that of his primary source, John Rastell’s 1529 *The Pastyme of the People*.<sup>6</sup> Elis appeals to his readers’ common sense and warns that the belief in such tall tales has led many other nations to mock the Welsh: *mae kenhedlaethau a nashiwns eraill...yn chwerthin gwattwar am yr ehudrwydd a'r ffolineb yssydd ynnom ni am roddi yn kreduniaeth a'n koel ar ysdori a chwedyl mor anghysbell ac mor anghyffelib* (“other peoples and nations...ridicule and mock the credulity and the foolishness that exists among us for placing our credence and faith in a story and fable so absurd and so unlikely”).<sup>7</sup> Despite his disdain for what he views as the gullibility of Welsh, however, Elis paradoxically seems to accept the existence of a race of native British giants. While he doubts many of the specific details of the Albina legend, he is reluctant to fully disregard the foundational role giants play in much of early Welsh history. Although a large portion of Elis’s version of the *llong foel* legend is an almost verbatim translation of Rastell’s history, Elis considers the existence of giants much more carefully than his source material. Rastell

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<sup>6</sup> John Rastell, *The Pastyme of the People* (London, 1529). A facsimile and critical edition of the text can be found in Albert J. Geritz, ed., *The Pastyme of the People and A New Boke of Purgatory by J. Rastell* (New York: Garland, 1985). An edition of Rastell’s version of the Albina legend can be found in Roberts, “Ystori’r Llong Foel,” 361-362. For more on the relationship between *Cronicl Chwech Oes y Byd* and *The Pastyme of the People*, see Hunter, “Difyrrwech y Bobl, Soffestri’r Bobl Seisnig: John Rastell ac Elis Gruffydd” in *Soffestri’r Saeson*, 51-77.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, “Ystori’r Llong Foel,” 359.

unequivocally rejects the legend's historicity, stating that "I se nat why those chylderne so gendred shuld be Gyauntes;"<sup>8</sup> Elis, on the other hand, concedes the implausibility of giants, but remains open to the possibility that this aspect of the story can be verified. His translation engages theological and philosophical debates regarding the theoretical, if not actual, probability of the existence of giants. Elis cannot simply dismiss the giants of Albion as pseudohistorical fantasy; whereas Rastell discredits stories concerning such monsters, Elis gives them his full consideration. The Welshman editorializes that although natural wonders such as giants and incubi are no longer present in the modern era, written and oral evidence supports claims of their existence throughout antiquity. Histories, both secular and religious, describe such creatures, and thus their existence cannot be uniformly denied. He concludes that the *llong foel* legend may be historical fantasy, but not once does he state that the presence of giants in prehistoric Britain would be impossible, instead only, in his words, *yn sickyr hryuedd Jawn* "surely very wondrous."<sup>9</sup>

In other sections of his chronicle, Elis actively defends the existence of giants and other equally remarkable creatures. For example, he includes marvelous tales concerning the labors of Hercules and the reincarnations of Taliesin within the pages of his history.<sup>10</sup> The wide variety of legendary and folkloric sources upon which Elis draws suggests that he was not averse to incorporating the wondrous into conventional histories. In fact, Elis doubts certain aspects of the *llong foel* legend not for its inclusion of monsters, but for its relative lack of them. He suggests that Albina and her sisters could not have wandered from Syria to Britain without meeting the many marvelous people who live on the world's edge. He cites the *mappae mundi*, the medieval

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Jones, ed., "Ystorya Ercwlf, pt. 1," *Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies* 10.4 (1941): 284-97; Ibid., "Ystorya Ercwlf, pt. 2," *Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies* 11.1 (1941): 21-30; Ibid., "Ystorya Ercwlf, pt. 3," *Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies* 11.2 (1943): 85-91; Bianca Ross, "Elis Gruffud, 'The Soldier of Calais', and his Version of the Story of Hercules," *Studia Celtica Japonica* 8 (1996): 47-57; and Patrick K. Ford, ed. *Ystoria Taliesin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992).

world maps whose borders teem with illustrations of various monstrous creatures, as proof: the Syrian ship would have *chyuwrdd a thir mewn ymrauaelion leoedd kyn dyuod ohoni J Vor Ogshion, yr hwn sydd ynn amgelchynv yr ynnys hon, megis ac J gall y ssawl bobyl yssydd olygus ac ynn ddyssgedig yn y Mappa Mwndi* (“touched land in a number of places before it came to the Ocean Sea, the one that encircles this island, as the many people who are skilled and learned in the *Mappa Mundi* know”).<sup>11</sup> For the story to conform to classical and medieval understandings of history and geography, it should feature more, not fewer, topographic and ethnographic curiosities.

One might wonder why Elis, a worldly and educated man, found himself defending, however tepidly, the legend of the giants of Albion. The answer to this question lies in nature of the medievalism of sixteenth-century Wales. Although both humanist and Protestant scholarly methods established a foothold among Welsh thinkers of the period, they did not replace the medieval literary traditions that prized the marvelous and extraordinary as inherent to a Welsh national and historical consciousness. The rise of Welsh antiquarianism in the late sixteenth century allowed these scholars to seamlessly blend medieval texts and modern historical methods, which resulted in a wave of treatises debating the use and disuse of the medieval Welsh literary and historical heritage.<sup>12</sup> In these texts, Welsh historians often promoted narratives from the medieval chronicle tradition and rewrote them for new political ends.

Although a strong antiquarian impulse can be seen in Welsh manuscript and print culture from the late middle ages onward, late sixteenth-century interest in medieval Welsh, and in particular Galfridian, history was spurred by external forces: namely, the histories of English and continental humanist scholars such as Rastell and Polydore Vergil, whose writings cast doubt over early British history derived from Welsh (or in the case of Geoffrey, pseudo-Welsh) sources.

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<sup>11</sup> Roberts, “Ystori’r Llong Foel,” 360.

<sup>12</sup> R. Geraint Gruffydd, “The Renaissance and Welsh Literature” in *The Celts and the Renaissance: Tradition and Innovation*, Eds. Glanmor Williams and Robert Owen Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 17-40.

In particular, they considered the marvelous elements of these histories, such as the giants of Albion, proof of the general unreliability of medieval Welsh history. This history had long featured in the political rhetoric surrounding Welsh culture and identity. By the late fifteenth century, it gained international relevance when Henry Tudor employed its imagery to garner Welsh support for his military campaign and invest his claims to the English crown with historical prestige and precedent. Because of its long life in the Welsh collective imagination, Welsh scholars felt compelled to defend this marvelous pseudohistory in the face of the humanist attacks in the mid-sixteenth century. Part of this defense took the form of an increased production of Middle Welsh translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Brut y Brenhinedd*, which experienced a surge in popularity during the early modern period.<sup>13</sup> Others such as Elis Gruffydd composed humanist works of their own in Welsh, Latin, and English that supported the value, if not veracity, of medieval Welsh historical narrative.

This historical revisionism led to the creation of a modern Welsh identity intrinsically tied to medieval narrative. This medievalist self-identification often and uncomfortably drew Welsh intellectuals in two competing directions. On one hand was the desire to participate in contemporary European intellectual trends that increasingly called into question the historical worth of the Matter of Britain, especially such unlikely elements as giants, Trojans, and Arthurian empire; on the other hand was that the fact that much of Welsh historical and bardic lore was deeply rooted in these same myths. By denying the claims of pseudohistory, Welsh historians would thus be denying their own cultural heritage and their claim to a rich antiquity equal to that of Rome. This dilemma took on greater urgency as the Acts of Union, and the subsequent legislative and linguistic changes they engendered, posed genuine challenges to the concept of a Welsh identity independent of English cultural hegemony. The Acts threatened to absorb the

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<sup>13</sup> Graham C.G. Thomas, "From Manuscript to Print: I. Manuscript" in *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1282-1550*, Vol. 3, Eds. A.O.H. Jarman, Gwilym Rees Hughes, and Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 247-8.

Welsh into a unified British body politic that ensured the erasure of regional and ethnic traditions and histories. In this environment, the medieval narratives that had argued for the uniqueness of Wales based on its geographical and zoological *mirabilia* found renewed political relevance. As sixteenth-century Welshmen defended medieval Welsh legend, they defended their own viability in the modern world. In this chapter, I will provide a brief historical background of the controversy concerning medieval insular origin legends that followed the publication of Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*. In particular, I will examine the role that giants played in Welsh and English histories of the period. By doing so, I will demonstrate how medieval literary tropes helped shape the political discourse of the Tudor era within Wales.

#### WALES AND THE TUDOR POLITICAL MILIEU

The importance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* to premodern Welsh identity has been well-established; although it is likely that Geoffrey wrote the text primarily for a Norman audience establishing itself as the new ruling class of England, the Welsh found inspiration in the stories and legends of their own past that form the basis of the text.<sup>14</sup> Not only did this fondness for Geoffrey manifest itself in numerous Welsh translations of the text, but the *Historia* and the European-wide Arthurian tradition that grew from it also had a profound effect on Welsh historiography, narrative, and poetry.<sup>15</sup> Although Geoffrey claimed to have translated his history from a now-lost ancient Welsh manuscript, the *Historia* was more a product of the author's impressive imagination than any real Welsh historical or folkloric tradition. Despite the text's tenuous links to early Welsh history, Geoffrey's influence on late medieval Welsh literature cannot be understated. The work introduced new narratives and traditions into the corpus; where Geoffrey had elaborated upon legitimate Welsh characters such as Arthur and

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, "Some Functions of Origin Stories in Early Medieval Wales"; Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and *Brut y Brenhinedd*"; and Roberts, ed., *Brut y Brenhinedd*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> See A.O.H. Jarman, "Y Ddadl Ynghylch Sieffre o Fynwy," 1-18; and Brynley Roberts, "Sieffre o Fynwy a Myth Hanes Cenedl y Cymry," 1-32.

Merlin, these characters took on a distinctively Galfridian flair in the thirteenth century and beyond. Particularly influential were Geoffrey's Merlinian prophecies, which told of the return of the *mab darogan* ("son of prophecy") who would restore the Welsh to their proper place as rulers of a united Britain.<sup>16</sup> Although prophecy had long been a popular form of Welsh poetic expression independent of the *Historia*,<sup>17</sup> Galfridian imagery infused later medieval Welsh prophetic visions, which culminated with the period of the *canu brud* ("songs of prophecy") in the mid- to late-fifteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Although this poetic form had flourished in the late medieval era, Galfridian prophecy and history continued to find an eager Welsh audience throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So great and long-lasting was Geoffrey's influence in early modern Wales that A.O.H. Jarman has deemed the history *ddolen gydiol ddiamheuol rhwng yr ymwybod cenedlaethol yn niwedd yr Oesoedd Canol a'r deffroad newydd yn y ddeunawfed ganrif* ("a doubtless connective link between the national consciousness of the late middle ages and the new awakening [of national identity] in the eighteenth century").<sup>19</sup> Yet nowhere is the political relevance of the Galfridian tradition more clear than in the rhetoric of early Tudor propaganda and the Welsh reaction it garnered.

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<sup>16</sup> Brynley Roberts, *ibid.*, 13-16; and A.O.H. Jarman, "The Merlin Legends and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy" in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, 117-45.

<sup>17</sup> For example, consider the ninth-century *Armes Prydein* (*The Prophecy of Britain*) and the early prophetic traditions associated with Merlin and Taliesin found in the poetry of the Black Book of Carmarthen. For more on early Welsh native prophecy, see Jarman, *ibid.*; Margaret Enid Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh: With English Parallels* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1937); and Aled Llion Jones, *Darogan: Prophecy, Lament, and Absent Heroes in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Glanmor Williams, "Prophecy, Poetry, and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales" in *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), 71-86. For a more extensive survey of the language of prophecy in late medieval Wales, see Jones, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Jarman, "Y Ddadl," 2.

Much has been written on the Henry Tudor's use of Welsh prophetic rhetoric during the lead-up to the Battle of Bosworth and his subsequent founding of the Tudor dynasty.<sup>20</sup> The debate continues concerning the degree to which Henry Tudor's claims of Welsh heritage were born out of a genuine sense of ethnic kinship rather than his aptitude for political theater. Nevertheless, the Tudors did indeed possess legitimate connections to the Welsh gentry: Henry Tudor, the grandson of Owain Tudor of Anglesey, was born in Pembrokeshire and spent his childhood at Raglan in Monmouthshire at the home of William Herbert. Here, Henry would likely have been exposed to Welsh-language poetic performance and would possibly have been instructed in traditional Welsh lore.<sup>21</sup> He made use of these Welsh connections during his military campaign against Richard III in which he accumulated a substantial body of Welsh support based on his pedigree.<sup>22</sup> His symbolic actions drew the attention of the Welsh poets: on the field of battle, he flew the Welsh standard, and his triumphant return from exile in Brittany mimicked the prophesied return of the Welsh hero Cynan.<sup>23</sup> These actions demonstrated an awareness of Galfridian prophetic tradition

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<sup>20</sup> For example, see David Rees, *The Son of Prophecy: Henry Tudor's Road to Bosworth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Haverfordwest: John Jones, 1997); Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "Prophecy and Welsh Nationhood in the Fifteenth Century," *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1985): 9-26; Williams, "The Bardic Road to Bosworth," 7-31; Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*, 21-31; and Hunter, *Sofffestri'r Saeson*, 1-27.

<sup>21</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation, and Reformation: Wales, c. 1415-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 231-33.

<sup>22</sup> R.A. Griffiths, "Henry Tudor: The Training of a King," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49.3 (1986): 197-218.

<sup>23</sup> Elissa Henken argues that the Cynan of the Welsh prophetic tradition is the same Cynan who colonizes Brittany at the end of the medieval prose tale *Breudwyd Maxen*. In the ninth-century poem *Armes Prydein*, he is prophesied to rally his troops in Brittany and return to Wales, where he will join with Welsh forces to overtake the English. When Henry Tudor returned to Britain to lay claim to the English Crown, he came from Brittany via Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire. The symbolic weight of his Welsh homecoming can be felt in English literature of the later Tudor period, which viewed the king's Welsh sojourn as the incorporation of the Welsh into an Anglo-British empire. For more on the role of Cynan in Welsh prophecy, see Elissa Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 28-44. For more on the role of Milford Haven in the early modern English literary imagination, see Emrys Jones, "Stuart Cymbeline," *Essays in Criticism* 11.1 (1964): 84-99; Glenn Clark, "The Strange Geographies of *Cymbeline*" in *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama*, Eds. John Gilles and Virginia Mason Vaughn (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 230-59; Ronald Boling, "Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare*



and began Henry Tudor's transformation into Henry VII of England, the *mab darogan* of the Welsh. The bardic role in the creation of Henry as the *mab darogan* is clear: by fashioning Henry as a Welshman and his reign the return of a prophesied Welsh king to the throne of Britain, the poets ensured support for the Tudor régime that legitimized the rule of Henry VII and his children.<sup>24</sup> Whether Henry actively cultivated this role is a trickier question that has been colored by Welsh nationalistic debates of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Peter Roberts has noted that there is little solid evidence that Henry Tudor

assiduously cultivate[d] his Welsh ancestry once he had gained the throne: the 'British' themes in his ceremonial propaganda did not differ significantly from those used by Edward IV before him. The new king duly rewarded individual Welsh supporters of his campaign and (with few exceptions) he could afford to take the loyalty of the Welsh for granted. Attempts by historians to argue that his rule in Wales was informed with a reciprocal sense of obligation have about them the air of special pleading.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of whether Henry Tudor conceived of himself as the *mab darogan*, his reign did not mark the foretold return of the crown to the Welsh. Although he entertained Welsh poets in his court and revoked many of the restrictive measures put in place against Wales after the Glyndŵr revolt of 1400, his deeds fell far short of what had been prophesied by the poets.<sup>26</sup> Despite these political realities, by the time of Henry VIII's ascension to the throne Welsh poets and the antiquarians who would succeed them as cultural custodians had laid the groundwork for the unification of England and Wales that was to come in the first half of the sixteenth century.

In 1509, Henry VII passed away from tuberculosis and was succeeded by his son Henry VIII. For much of the first half of Henry VIII's reign, the king maintained the same inclusive

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*Quarterly* 51.1 (2000): 33-66; and Terrence Hawkes, "Aberdaugleddyf" in *Shakespeare in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2002), 46-65.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, "The Bardic Road to Bosworth," 7-31; and Henken, 53-55.

<sup>25</sup> P.R. Roberts, "The Union with England and the Identity of 'Anglican' Wales," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 22 (1972): 50.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Recovery*, 238-40.

policy towards Wales that his father had.<sup>27</sup> However, crisis struck the island in the mid-1520s as Henry sought annulment from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn, an act that would begin the process of the Reformation within England and Wales. Although Henry VII's reign had brought an increased sense of stability across Wales, Henry VIII's schism with the Roman Church engendered dissent among many in the land, particularly in the southeastern Catholic stronghold of Glamorganshire.<sup>28</sup> In addition, non-religious contention was brewing among the Marcher lords, whose power was increasingly considered a threat to a centralized Tudor monarchy. The social upheaval arising from this discontent highlighted the inadequacies of the Welsh legal system. Wales saw a rise in theft during this time with which its tenuous tri-partite legal system of Welsh, Marcher, and English laws was unable to cope.<sup>29</sup> These Welsh threats posed a serious danger to Henry VIII's sovereignty, and in the 1530s, he began to consolidate his power in order to better safeguard it. Under the aegis of his chief minister Thomas Cromwell, the first of the Laws in Wales Acts (better known as the Acts of Union) was passed in 1535. Among the many changes these laws enacted in Wales, the Acts of Union eradicated Welsh and Marcher law in favor of a uniform English system; mandated English as the official language of Welsh public life; and divided Wales into English-style shires. Initially these changes were not met with hostility, and many prominent Welshmen took active roles in their implementation. For

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 247-50.

<sup>28</sup> J. Gwynfor Jones, *Early Modern Wales: c. 1525-1640* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 51-54.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 54-58. Along with the influence of corrupt juries and the increased prevalence of beggars throughout the countryside, Tudor officials cited an epidemic of cattle-raiding as one of the chief social problems in Wales. A 1533 survey conducted by the Henrician attorney Thomas Holte critiqued the heterogeneous nature of the law in Wales for the failure to restrain these threats to the security of the realm. He argued that the three disparate legal systems governing the land proposed disparate and, at times, contradicting punishments for such crimes. As such, the tripartite structure of governance in Wales failed to maintain a set of legal standards that extended beyond small regional spheres of influence; instead, it contributed to the existence a broken Welsh state whose peace and prosperity could not be assured except through external pressure. Holte concluded that the only hope for a peaceable Wales lay in its adoption of English jurisprudence. His suggestions were embraced by a large portion of English and Welsh politicians who viewed British unification as an antidote for internal Welsh strife. Shortly after Holte's 1533 survey, his recommendations would serve as part of the foundation for the Laws in Wales Acts.

example, the Act of 1542 was drafted under the guidance of Welshmen such as the Herberts, Edward Carne, and John Prise, who also oversaw the dissolution of the monasteries in South Wales.<sup>30</sup> Despite the challenges to Welsh culture that the Acts posed, they found general favor amongst the Welsh. Due to the increasing consolidation of Welsh and English identity that began under Henry VII, in many ways the Acts reflected the cultural shifts already well underway among the upper echelons of Welsh society.

Whether the Acts had a practical effect on the daily life of the average Welsh person remains up for debate and is a question beyond the scope of this dissertation. The imposition of English law led to a period of increased stability, which can be attested in the historical as well as the literary record.<sup>31</sup> Yet the consequences of these laws were not entirely positive. Despite the stability the Acts brought, they also furthered the process of anglicization of Welsh culture that had begun in the Middle Ages. Goronwy Wyn Owen has suggested that post-Union influence of English language and culture on the Welsh gentry led to a loss of patronage for Welsh language poets, which in turn brought about the sharp decline in the state of professional poetry in the late-sixteenth century. He describes the Acts as *yn gyfrifol am fwrw ein llên i gyflwr o argyfwng nas gwelwyd ei fath ers ymron dair canrif cyn hynny* (“responsible for throwing our literature into a state of crisis that had not been seen since almost three centuries earlier”).<sup>32</sup> Whether the Acts can be entirely blamed for the reduced position of Welsh bardic poetry is uncertain. Glanmor Williams argues: “the measures...were a success not because they initiated anything very much but because they took cognizance of and gave the seal of official approval to major administrative, legal, social, and economic changes that had long taken place or were already far

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<sup>30</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Recovery*, 259; and J. Gwynfor Jones, 99-100.

<sup>31</sup> J. Gwynfor Jones, 106-07.

<sup>32</sup> Goronwy Wyn Owen, “Cyd-destun Hanesyddol Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg 1536-1736,” *Llên Cymru* 31 (2008): 118.

advanced.”<sup>33</sup> In some ways, the language of the Acts reflected contemporary cultural and political reality more so than the older Welsh system had. Regardless of the ultimate scope of the societal changes they prompted, the Acts significantly altered the perception of the validity of Welsh language and culture within both Wales and England.

The effects of the Acts were perhaps more profound on the symbolic, rather than the practical level. They challenged the fundamental nature of insular origin legends as well the Welsh claims to autonomous rule associated with these legends. The Act of 1535 begins:

Albeit the Dominion Principality and Country of Wales justly and righteously is, and ever hath been, incorporated, annexed, united, and subject to and under the Imperial Crown of this Realm, as a very Member and Joint of the same, whereof the King’s most Royal Majesty of meer Droit, and very Right, is very Head King Lord and Ruler.<sup>34</sup>

This statement is a work of historical fiction: for centuries, Wales had remained unincorporated into English rule, and even the 1284 Statute of Rhuddlan that had authorized Edwardian control over North Wales had not entirely annexed the country to the English state.<sup>35</sup> Yet the Acts imposed not only an English legal system on Wales, but also an English identity. According to the Acts, Wales and England are inseparable, not only in 1535, but “ever hath been” since the beginning of history. Although trivial on its surface, this fiction presumes a shared insular historical narrative that allowed for the appropriation of Welsh nationalist iconography for English political purposes. The integration of Welsh historico-poetic lore into English political rhetoric had provided some of the groundwork for both the rise of Henry Tudor and the subsequent unification of England and Wales during the reign of his son. This fusion of English and Welsh historical narratives led to a burgeoning sense of a shared British identity among both the English and the Welsh.

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<sup>33</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Recovery*, 276.

<sup>34</sup> 27 Henry VIII, c. 26 in *The Statutes at Large of England and of Great Britain: From Magna Carta to the Union of the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. III, Ed. John Raithby (London, 1811), 243-55.

<sup>35</sup> R.R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 367-70.

Not all Welshmen eagerly adopted this new British identity in which Welshness was overshadowed by English hegemony. In studies of the origins of the British Empire, Wales is often depicted as the ‘good son’ compared to its colonial brother Ireland due to the lack of open rebellion that followed the passing of the Acts.<sup>36</sup> By the mid-fifteenth century, the English monarchy had exerted its influence in Wales for nearly three centuries: the Acts further established English influence in Welsh life, but they were able to do so without the violence that accompanied contemporary English campaigns in Ireland. Memories of the failed Glyndŵr rebellion still loomed in the Welsh historical consciousness, and few desired to once again engage in a losing battle with the English, many of whom had long been their neighbors and colleagues. This lack of outward rebellion has at times masked Wales’s quieter opposition to annexation. Despite the close relationship between England and Wales during this period, some historians have overstated the support the Tudors found within Wales. Given the nature of Welsh panegyric, it should be unsurprising that most bards lauded the Tudor monarchs; however, one can find bardic criticism of the Tudors by poets such as Lewys Glyn Cothi and Llywelyn ap Hwyl.<sup>37</sup> Welsh resistance to the Tudors was not limited to poetry. For example, the execution of the powerful Welsh lord Rhys ap Gruffydd in 1531 spurred an uprising among South Welsh nobility.<sup>38</sup> Rhys had been sentenced to death for conspiring against the king using language reminiscent of that found in medieval apocalyptic literature. The prophetic overtones of Rhys’s act did not pass by the Welsh *literati* unnoticed; even Elis Gruffydd, who was generally

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Schwyzer, “British History and ‘The British History’: The Same Old Story” in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, Eds. David J. Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21; and Phillip Jenkins, “Seventeenth Century Wales: Definition and Identity” in *British Consciousness and Identity: the Making of Britain, 1533-1707*, Eds. Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 214-16.

<sup>37</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Recovery*, 240.

<sup>38</sup> Hunter, *Soffestri*, 1-23.

supportive of the Tudors, found reason to doubt the charges and express his displeasure with Rhys's sentence.<sup>39</sup>

After Henry Tudor's rise to power, there was an increasing trend of English appropriation of Galfridian history that led to the denigration of a national Welsh history. What was once Welsh was becoming British in a Britain that was increasingly centered upon English urban life. This appropriation of Welsh history and identity would cast its shadow over Welsh scholarship of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>40</sup> Although some Welsh poets and historians sought to alleviate this problem through fervent appeals to the Tudor monarchs to remember their Welsh ancestry, others attempted to defend Welsh heritage against the encroachment of English language and culture through the promotion of native Welsh language and history. In the face of the threat of cultural erasure in a burgeoning Anglo-British empire, historians and antiquarians turned to pseudohistory in order to argue for the necessity of an independent Wales. Like their medieval predecessors, they often concentrated on the marvelous and fantastic elements of such histories as proof of Welsh exceptionalism during periods of English expansion. The sixteenth-century historians returned to these narratives in order to justify Wales's continued political relevance in a post-Union political milieu. These authors promoted Welsh origin legends, in particular stories of Brutus and the giants of Albion that would verify Welsh claims to aboriginal status and the land rights that accompanied it.

#### **POLYDORE VERGIL AND THE GALFRIDIAN DEBATES**

In his introduction to the 1567 translation of the New Testament into Welsh, William Salesbury writes: *Megis y mae yn ddiareb gan y metelwyr may goreu aur yw'r hen* ("As the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> For more on the anglicization of Welsh pseudohistory, see David Armitage, "The Empire of Great Britain: England, Scotland, and Ireland, c. 1542-1612" in *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37; Alan MacColl, "The Meaning of 'Britain' in Medieval and Early Modern England," *The Journal of British Studies* 45.2 (2006): 248-69; and Brynley Roberts, "Sieffre o Fynwy," 26-27.

metallurgists' proverb says, the best gold is the old gold").<sup>41</sup> Although Salesbury is discussing the (imagined) antiquity of Welsh Protestant religious practices, this sentiment embodies the prevailing antiquarian attitude expressed throughout much of Welsh humanist writing during the sixteenth century. Whereas medieval texts had highlighted Welsh exceptionalism through emphasizing the topographical singularity of Wales and its connections with the equally exceptional Far East, authors of the Tudor Era emphasized the extraordinary antiquity of Welsh history, language, and religion. English appropriation of Welsh historical narrative led academic Welshmen to demonstrate the inherent Welshness of the Galfridian tradition; according to this tradition, the English did not arrive in Britain until the fifth century, a fact that upends English genealogical claims to ancient British heroes, in particular Arthur and Brutus. Welsh historians and humanists also made much of the fact that Geoffrey claims to be a translator of a Welsh *liber vetustissimus* rather than the author of the *Historia* text. The possibility of the existence of a primary source in the ancient British language validated the antiquity of Welsh history and further distanced the English from claims of Trojan or Arthurian ancestry.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, many Welsh authors were happy to remind the newly-Protestant English that according to the Galfridian narrative, their Saxon ancestors had brought Roman Catholicism to the land, disrupting the worship of what some of them liked to imagine had been a native British proto-Protestantism,<sup>43</sup> the existence of which challenged England's ownership over the new insular faith.<sup>44</sup> In the face of

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<sup>41</sup> William Salesbury, "Testament Newydd 1567" in *Rhagymadroddion 1547-1659*, Ed. Garfield H. Hughes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Jarman, "Y Ddawl," 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> For example, in his introductory letters accompanying the 1567 translation of the New Testament Richard Davies informs his readers of a now-lost Welsh translation of the Bible that predated the Saxon arrival. He invokes the legend of Ysgolan, the wicked medieval monk who was said to have burned the ancient books of the Britons, to explain its absence. See Richard Davies, "Testament Newydd, 1567" in Hughes, ed., *Rhagymadroddion*, 17-43. For more on Davies and the belief in a pre-Saxon Welsh Protestant ethos, see Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory*, 89-96; and A.O.H. Jarman, "Cerdd Ysgolan," *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 10 (1977): 51-75.

<sup>44</sup> Although much of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquarian Welsh scholarship is of a distinctly Protestant flavor, it should be noted that this emphasis on Welsh antiquity was not the concern of

the growing political and cultural consolidation of England and Wales that defined much of the sixteenth century, Welsh humanist authors, including many who had initially supported the union, sought to divorce English identity from Welsh antiquity, turning the Welsh past into a foreign country for those who did not meet the correct genealogical, geographic, and linguistic requirements.

Unsurprisingly, this period experienced a surge in the number of Welsh manuscript witnesses of Galfridian histories (given the title *Brut y Brenhinoedd*), which were usually partnered with *Ystoria Dared* (a history of the Trojan War) and the *Brut y Tywysogion* to provide a unified view of the Welsh people from their origins in Troy to the present day. Independent accounts of pertinent scenes from the *Historia* and related texts also appear in manuscript form throughout the century. Particularly popular was the *llong foel* legend, of which three different versions are extant in fifteen manuscripts (including Elis Gruffydd's version discussed above).<sup>45</sup> As I have shown in the previous chapter, the existence of British giants has long been a feature of Welsh pseudohistorical and nationalist narratives. In the *Mabinogi*, giants are often morally ambiguous: while Ysbaddaden is Arthur's wicked (if comical) nemesis, the giant Bendigeidfran is depicted as a strong ruler whose enormous body literally supports the body politic of all of Britain. In *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the portrayal of giants is wholly negative: the giants are faceless, nameless aboriginals who pose challenges to the sovereignty of Brutus and the subsequent kings of Britain. Their existence is foundational to a historic sense of Welsh ownership over the island: by defeating the indigenous giants, Brutus and his descendants lay claim to the island, a claim

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Protestants alone. As can be seen in the works of men like Siôn Dafydd Rhys and Gruffydd Robert, both expatriates in Italy during the Elizabethan era, Catholic authors shared the same concerns as their Protestant counterparts regarding what they perceived as the misuse of Galfridian history. In fact, the work of these Catholic scholars often exhibits a sense of nostalgia beyond that of Protestant authors: often Catholic authors mourned the loss of not only of their history and language, as did the Protestants, but also the loss of their religion and their native land left behind in exile.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, "Ystori'r Llong Foel," 342-48.



that the Welsh pseudohistorical tradition affirmed would be restored to the Welsh with the return of the *mab darogan*.

Neither Geoffrey nor his earliest Welsh translators were interested in the origins of these giants. The legend of Albina and the birth of the giants first appears in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English chronicles, although Brynley Roberts has noted that many of these credit a chronicle history by a possibly fictional Welshman named David Pencair as the source of the legend.<sup>46</sup> This text is no longer extant, if it ever existed, but the fact that these English authors attributed the *llong foel* legend to a Welshman is suggestive of the perceived close relationship between giants and Welsh history. Despite the tale's lack of an authoritative Welsh pedigree, by the sixteenth century it had found a popular audience among the Welsh. There are three independent redactions of the tale extant. Although these redactions differ in a variety of details including the number of sisters exiled and the location of their homeland, they all agree that Britain was initially inhabited by the gigantic spawn of the exiled sisters and the native incubi. Each version highlights the connection between Britain and the East. Depending on the version of the tale, the women who inhabit the island arrive from Syria, Africa, or Greece; and in each version, they must sail around the periphery of the world to reach Britain. The tale is deeply indebted to medieval notions of geography and wonder. The Welsh versions of the Albina legend show little awareness of contemporary geographical knowledge but instead reflect the world of the medieval *mappae mundi*. Like many medieval Welsh *mirabilia* texts, the Welsh Albina

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 348-51. As I argue in Chapter One of this dissertation, the presence of an abbreviated early fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman version of the tale (*Des Granz Geanz*) suggests its origins are likely to be found outside of Wales. However, it is notable that fourteenth-century English historiographers attributed this legend to the work of a fictional Welsh historian, rather than Anglo-Norman popular narrative. Reasons for this Welsh attestation are unclear. I would argue that these English authors associated the Welsh landscape with marvels such as giants and thus located the origin of this tale within its borders. It is also possible that these authors wished to ascribe the tale to a Welsh source in order to grant it a sense of historical authenticity associated with Welsh Galfridian materials. See Christopher Baswell, "Albyne sails for Albion: Gender, Motion, Foundation and the English Imperial Imagination" in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages*, Ed. Peregrine Horden (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 157-68; and Anke Bernau, "Myths of origin and the struggle over nationhood in medieval and early modern England" in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, Eds. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 106-118.

legend highlights the foreignness of the British landscape: the land is a fruitful oasis filled with spirits and surrounded by mermaids who, in some versions, are also the descendants of one of the sisters on the ship.<sup>47</sup> Soon after the Syrian ship lands, the race of giants populates the landscape of Britain, only to await their eventual defeat by Brutus and the foundation of Welsh hegemony over the island.

This view of giants was transmitted and elaborated upon by Welsh historians throughout the late medieval and early modern period, by which time it had been established as a fundamental element of the British origin story. However, it wasn't until the appearance of the Italian historian Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, first published in 1534, that the issue of giants gained new political relevance.<sup>48</sup> Galfridian history had faced challenges from English historians in the past.<sup>49</sup> The earliest challenges to its veracity appeared shortly after the *Historia*'s composition in the works of Geoffrey's contemporary William of Newburgh.<sup>50</sup> Ranulph Higden and Gerald of Wales had also found reason to doubt Geoffrey's history, and in the fifteenth century, John Whethamstede and Thomas Rudborne critiqued the *Historia* as a work of imaginative fiction.<sup>51</sup> Polydore Vergil was not even the first among his contemporaries to dispute

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<sup>47</sup> The NLW MS 13075B (formerly Llanover MS B 17) version of the tale claims: *A'r drydedd ar igain a vysai varw ar anedigaeth merch a enillysai hi ar y mor yn y llong. Kans yn y gwydd i gyd i daiith ryw beth kyflym i gidio a hi, a merch a aned o'r gwaethred hwnnw; ag ir oedd y naill hanner yddi yn bysg. A phan gavas hi y dwfr ny ddaiith hi mwy i'r lann. A honno a elwir y vorvorwyn.* ("And the twenty-third [daughter] died during the birth of a daughter who was born at sea in the ship. Because before all their eyes came some quick thing to copulate with her, a daughter was born from that deed; and one half of her body was that of a fish. And when she took to the water, she never came back to the shore. And she was called the mermaid"). Roberts, "Ystori'r Llong Foel," 355-357.

<sup>48</sup> The work also appeared in two revised editions in 1546 and 1555. The most recent print edition of the *Anglica Historia* can be found in Denys Hay, ed., *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D. 1485–1537* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1950). A more recent online edition of the 1555 text can be found at Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia (1555 version)*, Ed. and Trans. Dana F. Sutton, Last modified May 25, 2010 <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polverg/>>.

<sup>49</sup> Jarman, "Y Ddadl," 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Ed. and Trans. P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988).

<sup>51</sup> Jarman, "Y Ddadl."

the veracity of Welsh pseudohistory: in 1527, the Scotsman Hector Boece published his *Historia Gentis Scotorum*, which was followed shortly by the publication of John Rastell's *The Pasttyme of the People* in 1529. Nevertheless, Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* left the deepest and longest lasting mark on the English opinion on Geoffrey of Monmouth. Traditionally, Vergil has been lauded as one of the earliest humanist historians whose work reflects the principles of what would become the modern historical method.<sup>52</sup> For many, his rejection of Geoffrey is emblematic of modernity's rejection of medieval modes of history and narrative. In recent years, some scholars have suggested that this praise often overstates the humanistic and modernist approaches of Vergil's method, overlooking certain medievalist elements of his history that served to provide the foundation for Tudor dominion over Wales and Ireland.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the extent to which Vergil's *Anglica Historia* undermined the Welsh historiographical tradition in the eyes of English and continental humanists should not be understated.

Although a native of Urbino where he absorbed the humanist intellectual currents that had been fostered in Italy since the mid-fifteenth century, Polydore Vergil spent almost half of his adult life in England, becoming a naturalized Englishman in 1510. While in England, he became deeply interested in the ancient history of Britain while editing an edition of Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*; after this edition proved to be a success, he was commissioned by Henry VII to compose his own history of the island. Vergil's *Anglica Historia* chronicles the history of Britain from antiquity to the reign of Henry VII and relies on his own readings of late classical and medieval Roman and British texts for much of Britain's early history. Although Vergil employs both for his understanding of the Pre-Saxon era, he does not grant the same amount of authority to British and Roman sources. In particular, he rejects the authority of the

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<sup>52</sup> The standard account of Vergil's influence on English humanist history remains Denys Hay's lionizing *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance historian and man of letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>53</sup> See Eric Haywood, "Humanism's Priorities and Empire's Prerogatives: Polydore Vergil's Description of Ireland," *Proceedings from the Royal Irish Academy* 109C (2009): 197-237.

*Historia Regum Britanniae*. He finds the stories in Geoffrey too outlandish and likens them to ancient Greek and Roman mythologies. He writes:

*Et id, quia lex iubet ut scriptor ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non audeat. Est itaque in eo libro, cuiuscunque sit, Brutum filium Sylvii, quem Ascanio Aeneae filio natum constat, post Graecam peragratam devictamque Aquitaniam, monitis Dianae Britanniam cursu petiisse, et primo accessu gigantibus qui id temporis eam tenerent insulam, atque ad arcendam vim advenarum armati undique evestigio concurrissent, interfectis, eam occupasse, ex seque Britanniam appellasse, et sic demum Brutum generis Britannici atque imperii autorem extitisse, filios genuisse, ac illos deinde et gentem suam et regnum mirum in modum propagasse. Caeterum Livius, Dionysius Halicarnaseus, et plerique alii qui diligenter de antiquitatibus Romanorum scripserunt nunquam huius Bruti meminere.*

The historians' law is that a writer should neither dare to say a falsehood, nor shrink from telling a truth. So then, it is written in that book (*Historia Regum Britanniae*), of whatever quality it may be, that Brutus was the son of Silvius, the agreed son of Aeneas' son Ascanius, and when he had traveled through Greece and conquered Aquitaine, by the instruction of Diana he sailed to Britain and killed off the giants, who possessed the island at the time, when they speedily flocked together under arms to drive off the newcomers. Then he occupied the island and named it Britain after himself, and so Brutus was the father of the British nation and empire. But Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and many others who wrote diligently about Roman antiquities never made mention of this Brutus (I.19).<sup>54</sup>

Vergil notes that not only do Roman histories not mention Brutus and the giants, neither does Gildas, whom Vergil considers his one unimpeachable British source for this period. He compares the chronology and genealogies of Gildas and the Roman historians and finds Geoffrey's history lacking on both accounts. Rather than the great giant-slayers and kings that Geoffrey depicts, Vergil suggests that the ancient Britons were a backward race of blue-painted warriors who were civilized by the coming of the Romans (I.29).

Vergil also cites the handful of medieval scholars who doubted Geoffrey's veracity; he especially relies on the work of William of Newburgh, who described Geoffrey as *cognomine Arthurus, pro eo quod multa de Arthuro ex priscis Britonum pigmentis sumpta, et ab se aucta, per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine obtexit* ("having the surname of

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<sup>54</sup> All quotes and translations are taken from Sutton's online edition of Vergil's 1555 text.

Arthur because he writes much about Arthur taken from the fables of the ancient Britons and embroidered by himself, and passes it off as honest history by giving it the coloration of the Latin language”).<sup>55</sup> Vergil is more sympathetic than Newburgh: rather than ascribing malicious intent to Geoffrey’s lies, he suggests that the urge to inflate the prestige of one’s ancestry is a natural human impulse. He concedes that even the Romans traced their own genealogy back to the gods, so it should be no surprise that the Welsh wished to grant themselves an equally marvelous history:

*Sed ea venia olim antiquitati data est, uti plerique populi ausi sint origines suas etiam ad deos, sicuti in primis fecere Romani, referre authores, quo primordia gentis et urbium augustiora felicioraque essent, et illa quamvis ex poeticis magis fabulis quam ex incorruptis rerum gestarum monumentis constarent, pro veris tamen habita sunt.*

But this license has been given this liberty, since many peoples have dared to trace their ancestry even to the gods, as Roman authors took the lead in doing, so that the beginnings of their nation and its cities would be more dignified and blessed, and those things, though they were taken from poetic fictions rather than incorrupt records of things done, have nonetheless been taken for the truth (I.19). As a historian, he must speak out against these sorts of tales even if they are the means by which *imperiti vulgi, cui semper pluris est novitas quam veritas, admiratione in coelo esse videntur* (“the unschooled common run of men [for whom novelty always counts more than truth] seem transported to heaven with wonder”) (I.19).

Vergil’s critiques of the Galfridian tradition garnered lively responses, both positive and negative, from contemporary British intellectuals. Some Englishmen rejected Vergil’s attacks, mostly notably John Leland whose 1536 *Codrus sive Laus et Defensio Gallofridi Arturii contra Polydorum Vergilium* and 1544 *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii regis Britannia* were the earliest defenses of Galfridian history against the claims set forth in *Anglica Historia*.<sup>56</sup> But despite any insult English authors might have experienced at Vergil’s rejection of the Galfridian origin legend, it is fair to say that Welsh historians particularly felt the sting of Vergil’s dismissal of a

<sup>55</sup> William of Newburgh qtd. in Polydore Vergil, I.19.

<sup>56</sup> James P. Carley, “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: A Battle of the Books” in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, Ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (New York: Garland, 1996), 185-204.

heroic British past. Since the Middle Ages, Welsh identity had been bound to the most marvelous elements of this history. If one threat of Tudor Era Anglo-Welsh relations was the risk of English appropriation of Welsh narrative in the creation of an overarching Anglo-British identity, Polydore Vergil represented the opposite, but equally palpable, danger of complete delegitimization. This threat sparked an impassioned defense of traditional history that emphasized the role of wonder and *mirabilia* in the development of the Welsh nation. In response to the 1546 edition of *Anglica Historia*, John Prise composed his treatise *Historiae Britannicae Defensio*, in which he carefully presents reasons why Galfridian history should not be discarded.<sup>57</sup> Prise, a former student at Oxford, was closely aligned with the English political and cultural elite of his day: he had helped draft the language of the 1542 Laws in Wales Act and had overseen the Henrician dissolution of the monasteries in Wales. In his *apologia*, he appeals to the principles of humanist scholarship that Vergil had championed to defend Welsh history against its detractors; he does so not out of any misplaced national bias, he claims, but rather for the historian's love of truth. However, despite Prise's humanist pedigree, a potent strain of medievalism runs through his text. Prise's medievalism is not unusual for Welsh humanists of the early modern period who often sought to reconcile marvelous medieval narrative with modern scientific knowledge. Welsh humanists, unlike their English and continental counterparts, tended to embrace the medieval past, fetishizing the medieval Welsh historical and literary traditions as equal to those of Classical Rome.<sup>58</sup> In the *Defensio*, Prise counters Vergil's attacks on Welsh origin legends: he upholds the

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<sup>57</sup> John Prise, *Historiae Britannicae Defensio*, London, 1573. See also, Ceri Davies, *Rhagymadroddion a Chyflwyniadau Lladin 1551-1632* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that despite their claims to the contrary, humanists from other traditions were not immune to certain medievalist impulses. For example, English humanist defenses of the Galfridian tradition speak to the continued interest in medieval historiography, while works such as William Baldwin's *Mirror for Magistrates*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* employ a variety of medieval literary tropes. Furthermore, the antiquarianism that defined much of the early modern scholarship throughout Europe was heavily informed by medievalist sensibilities. Yet, for all the medievalist impulse of the English humanist tradition, it is fair to say that the Welsh authors were more self-consciously medievalist and more openly dedicated to defending their vernacular tradition against the weight of the Greco-Roman tradition. For more on early modern English medievalism, see the essays in Gordon

Welsh language and landscape as relics of an ancient British culture that continues to persist among his countrymen. He argues that because the modern Welsh speak a form of the ancient British language, the ancient Britons must have existed as described in the Welsh histories.<sup>59</sup> For Prise, the question of Geoffrey's worth as an historical source is not merely an academic one, but one that has a profound bearing on contemporary Welsh cultural life.

Prise's critique of Vergil often centers on his opponent's lack of knowledge regarding the Welsh tradition as well as on the linguistic barriers that keep the Italian from understanding Welsh sources. Of primary importance to Prise is the fact that Geoffrey claims to have gathered his history from a now-lost Welsh manuscript history. If this manuscript could be found, it would demonstrate the ignorance of Vergil's claim that no manuscript evidence exists for early British history. Yet Prise argues that it is unnecessary to search for Geoffrey's *liber vestustissium* in order to verify early Welsh historical lore even if its discovery would appease detractors. He assures his reader that manuscripts exist *in Welsh* that substantiate Geoffrey's history; however, because Vergil had no knowledge of this language, he dismissed them. He accuses Vergil of rewriting British history to fit into a Roman worldview, deliberately using only Latin sources that say little about native British history and culture. In a letter to Edward VI, Prise claims:

*Multom sanem minorem fidem ei tribuendam censeo, quis non olum suam praecaeteris historiam in precio haberi velit, verumetiam nullam omnino ex antiquissima huius. Insulae historia efficere studeat, in mille et amplius annorum curricula quibus hic imperatum est, perpetuis tenebris et obliuione sepelire conetur. Quod vtique Polydorum Vergilium pro virili satagisse in sua, qua res Brytannicas illustrare se tulit, historia, quum Romanas reuera victorias atque trophea hac in Insula (homo videlicet Italus) potissimum extulerit, hoc opusculo (Princeps illustrissime) palam facere institui.*

But I believe that there is always less trust placed in that man who not only desires that his own history be considered more valuable than others, but who also is eager not to depict history in any kind of legitimate way, the ancient history of this island, but who, instead, tries to hide in darkness and perpetual forgetfulness a thousand or more years when we had our own kings Most

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McMullan and David Matthews, *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Ceri Davies, "Polidor Vergil, Syr John Prise ac Urddas y Cymry," 61.

Illustrious Prince, Polydore Vergil tried vigorously to do all this in his history; he took it upon himself to clear up the history of Britain when he was in truth—and he is an Italian, of course—chiefly exaggerating the victories and exploits of the Romans in this island.<sup>60</sup>

Prise highlights the geographic marginality of Britain as the reason Vergil's Roman sources knew little about the marvelous history of the island. He echoes Vergil's claim that Britain's distance from Rome obscured it from the sight of Roman historians and authors. Whereas Vergil cites this distance as proof of the cultural obscurity of the British people, Prise echoes medieval claims to a Welsh cultural exceptionalism based on its peripheral existence. The distance from Rome does not subordinate Welsh history to Roman history; instead, it allows for the creation of an equally illustrious past independent of Roman involvement.

Although John Prise wrote the *Defensio* circa 1553, it wasn't until twenty years later that his son, Richard Prise, posthumously published it in 1573. Richard's introduction to the work echoes the grievances of his father; like his father, he emphasizes the lack of intimacy with Wales that plagues British histories written by foreigners. Such histories, he argues, are intrinsically less useful than histories written by Welshmen; the writing of British history does not require Latin erudition but rather a native familiarity with the language and landscape. Brynley Roberts has noted that a shared history is often insufficient to create a national identity; instead, it is the shared interpretation of that history that unites a people.<sup>61</sup> In the medieval and early modern periods, Welsh identity was partly defined by a shared interpretation of Geoffrey's *Historia*, an interpretation to which Polydore cannot contribute due to linguistic and national boundaries.<sup>62</sup>

Richard Prise asserts:

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<sup>60</sup> Prise, "Praefatio" in *Historiae Britannicae Defensio*.

<sup>61</sup> Roberts, "Sieffre o Fynwy," 3-5.

<sup>62</sup> Although these claims might seem jingoistic or provincial to the modern eye, Prise's views correspond with late sixteenth-century continental theories concerning historical writing. During this period, a trend towards national or even city-oriented histories emerged as humanist historians began disregarding the medieval form of universal history. In the section from which the following excerpt is taken, Prise is echoing the work of the contemporaneous French historian Jean Bodin. See Claus Uhlig, "National Historiography and Cultural Identity: The Example of the English Renaissance" in *Writing the Early*



*An autem in his tribus, Polydoro homine Italo et linguae non solum Brytannicae verum etiam Anglicae ignaro, superior fuerit pater meus, qui gentis suae historiam Brytannicam scriptam, et obsoleta quaeque linguae Brytanniae natus est, et maiorem eius partem oculis perlustravit, grauissimae tuae et aliolem censurae, iudicandum relinquo.*

I leave you and other important people to judge if my father, who studied and investigated the history of his people (written in the British) along with all unfamiliar traces of the British language, was born in Britain, saw the greatest part of it with his own eyes—excelled in these three things over Polydore, an Italian who was ignorant not only of British, but of English as well.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike Polydore, Richard Prise argues, his father spoke the Welsh tongue and traversed the Welsh terrain, which alone qualified him to compose British history. Although he was a highly learned man, a trained lawyer, and collector of manuscripts who held a respected position in the Tudor court, these aspects alone did not authorize him to write the history of Britain; instead, it was his familiarity with the land, language, and culture of Wales that readied him for the task.

For all its ardency, John Prise's *Defensio* is not entirely uncritical of the more outrageous claims of the Galfridian narrative. Like Vergil, he is committed to a close analysis of the extant source texts such as Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium* and Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*. In general, however, Prise strongly supports the veracity of the British origin myth. Following medieval historiographical practices, he depicts the foundation of Britain as a series of invasions, beginning with the arrival of Brutus from Troy. Regarding the legend of the murderous sisters and the giants of Albion, he admits that this story cannot be found in the earliest sources: *mihi quidem non probatur, nec in historia Britannica habetur* ("it has not been demonstrated to me, nor is it found in the history of the Britons").<sup>64</sup> He traces the name Albion back to Greek roots, which further supports his claim that the original inhabitants of the island were of Trojan

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*Modern English Nation: The Transformation of National Identity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, Ed. Herbert Grabes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 89-98.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Prise's claim that Vergil knew no English seems unlikely, given that the Italian spent thirty-seven years of his life in England writing for English patrons (albeit in Latin). Rather, the claim likely reflects Prise's attempts to exploit the anti-Roman and anti-Catholic biases prominent in the Reformation Tudor court in order to gain the sympathies of his non-Welsh readers.

<sup>64</sup> Prise, 57.

extraction. To support his belief in the Near Eastern ancestry of the Welsh, he promotes the popular etymology of *Cymraeg* that designated the word a compound of *cam* and *Groeg*, i.e. “broken Greek.” He also remarks that that the island still retains the name *yr Wen Ynys* (“the White Island”) in the Welsh language, which would suggest that the name Albion refers to the White Cliffs of Dover. But like Elis Gruffydd, Prise is unwilling to completely disregard the legend of Albina and her sisters. He notes that although the majority of sources list Brutus and the Trojans as the first inhabitants of the island, it is credible enough (*tametsi satis credibile sit*) that others dwelled there before their arrival. Prise casts doubt on certain elements on the *llong foel* legend, but not on the presence of giants themselves, whom he notes appear in a wide variety of native and foreign histories. Any skepticism Prise exhibits toward the Albina legend is due not to the presence of giants in the tale but instead to the lack of early manuscript sources that verify the story. Could these be found, he argues, the legend would be verified.<sup>65</sup>

#### TUDOR WELSH CHRONICLERS AND THE MATTER OF BRITAIN

John Prise and his son were not the only Welshmen to rush to the defense of Welsh pseudohistory. In contrast to English historians who increasingly disregarded folkloric British origin legends, humanists throughout Wales eagerly embraced the role giants played in the

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<sup>65</sup> A certain irony overshadows John Prise’s *Defensio*: Prise argues for the importance of Welsh language sources in establishing Welsh antiquity, yet he, among a handful of other Welshmen, had been responsible for the dissolution of Welsh monasteries only years before, an act that had decimated the corpus of medieval Welsh manuscripts. The loss of these manuscripts could be deflected in some part by the legend of Ysgolan, the fictional medieval Welsh monastic and English collaborator who was said to be responsible for the destruction of the ancient manuscript evidence of former Welsh glory. This particular myth gained significant traction during the sixteenth century and was disseminated in the works of Protestant humanists such as Richard Davies and William Salesbury. This legend allowed these men who had been involved to varying degrees in the destruction of medieval manuscript libraries to divert the blame of this destruction onto a Roman Catholic scapegoat. This anti-Catholic bias can be seen in the criticism of the *Defensio*: Prise argues that Polydore Vergil cannot fully comprehend ancient British history not only because of his Italian nationality, but also due to his Roman religious beliefs. Prise’s own culpability in the lack of Welsh manuscript evidence is never mentioned. His involvement with the dissolution paradoxically led to his interest in the preservation of Welsh antiquity. From this experience, he became exposed to the riches to be found in Welsh manuscript sources and began cultivating his own collection, which included the Black Book of Carmarthen. From this manuscript, Prise would have been exposed to the pre-Galfridian Welsh Merlinian tradition, which he might have accepted as evidence for the existence of Geoffrey’s *liber vetustissimus*.

foundation of the island.<sup>66</sup> As I have shown in the previous chapter, giants had long featured in Welsh narrative, and Welsh humanists passionately championed these figures when they came under attack in the late sixteenth century. Defenses of the Albina legend appear throughout the many Welsh histories written during this period, including those of Ifan Llwyd ap Dafydd, David Powel, and Humphrey Llwyd. Others produced new translations of medieval chronicles that emphasized the importance of giants in early British history. For example, the bard Gruffudd Hiraethog produced a Welsh chronicle that presented the history of the island from the *adventus Bruti* to the reign of Henry VIII<sup>67</sup> Although Gruffudd did not compose this chronicle, traditionally given the title *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys* (*The Wonders of the Island*), it is significant that Gruffudd, a man well acquainted with the various contemporary debates concerning Welsh history, chose or was chosen to copy it.<sup>68</sup> Sections of *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys* are loosely based on Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, a text that remained popular in England throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth

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<sup>66</sup> Along with the waning support for giant lore among humanists, Daniel Woolf has shown that even popular belief in giants began to fade in England by the 1580s. Defense of these narratives is one of the defining traits of Welsh intellectual life during the sixteenth century that differentiates Welsh humanism from its English counterpart. The Celtic West was so closely associated with giants that the Englishmen who did defend tales of giants almost inevitably located them within the Welsh landscape. See Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 325-31.

<sup>67</sup> Gruffudd is an important figure in sixteenth-century Welsh intellectual and literary history: although a professional poet, he maintained close ties with humanist scholars, particularly William Salesbury. His collection of proverbs formed the basis for Salesbury's *Oll synnwyr pen Kembero ygyd* (*All the Wisdom in a Welshman's Head*), one of the earliest Welsh books to be published. For more on Gruffudd Hiraethog's relationship to Welsh humanist circles, see D.J.Bowen, *Gwaith Gruffudd Hiraethog* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), cxii-cxxiii.

<sup>68</sup> Gruffudd Hiraethog's copy of *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys* can be found in National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS163ii. Due to damage and missing folia, the first chapter of the history is no longer extant in Peniarth 163ii. The same chronicle in a different hand can be found in NLW, Peniarth MS 147, which is a copy of Pen. 163ii. A second independent redaction can be found in NLW, Peniarth MS 168. In their electronic edition of the text, David Willis and Ingo Mittendorf interpolate the Pen.168 version of the missing first chapter into the body of the Pen. 163ii version to provide the complete body of the chronicle text. See Willis and Mittendorf, eds. "'Rhyfeddode'r Ynys,' Peniarth 163 ii (1543), 1-55," *A Historical Corpus of the Welsh Language, 1500-1850*, Cambridge University, 2004, Accessed 09 April 2011 <<http://people.pwf.cam.ac.uk/dwew2/hcwl/t/webconc/t81.htm>>. For more on Gruffudd Hiraethog's involvement with this manuscript, see Bowen, *Gwaith Gruffudd Hiraethog*, xcv.-xcvii.

centuries before finding a renewed readership in Wales in the sixteenth century.<sup>69</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, the *Polychronicon* details the marvels of the Welsh landscape and relies on Galfridan history for large portions of its narrative. However, Higden often marginalizes the Welsh and dismisses their claims of autonomy. In the first chapter of the *Polychronicon*, he describes the foundation of Britain as well as the etymologies for its competing names, Britain and Albion.<sup>70</sup> He writes:

First as Galfride saith this lande was named Albion after the name of Albyne the oldest doughter of Dioclesian and had xxxij. sustres. And they were first that enhabited this lande. And because she was the oldest suster she named this lond Albion after her owne name as the cronicle reherseth. Othir saye that this lond was named Albion as it where the white londe of white rockes aboute the clines of the see that were seyne fro ferre. Afterward Brute conquered this lond and callid it Brytayne after his owne name. Thenne Saxons or Englisshmen conquered this lond and callid it Anglia that is Englonde. Or it is callid Anglia of a quene that owed this lande that was named Angela and was a noble dukes doughter of the Saxons. Or as ysid seyth Anglia hath that name as it were an angle and a corner of the world.<sup>71</sup>

What becomes quickly apparent is the inherent Englishness of Higden's telling of the Albion myth. Although Higden recounts the pseudo-Galfridian *llong foel* legend, he spends much of his account posing alternative theories that would provide the island with an English, rather than British or Welsh, origin. He rejects Albion for Anglia, replacing the Welsh origin legend with an English one. Kathy Lavezzo has suggested that although scholars have long regarded the *Polychronicon* as a universal history of the *sex aetatis mundi* mold *par excellence*, its pro-English

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<sup>69</sup> Higden's *Polychronicon* was an important source for several other Welsh chronicles in manuscript, including the chronicle of Elis Gruffydd. For more see, Hunter, *Soffestri*, 30-34; and Graham Thomas, "From Manuscript to Print: I. Manuscript" in *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1282-1550*, 248.

<sup>70</sup> Although first appearing in Latin in the first half of the fourteenth century, sixteenth-century Welsh scholars would likely have known the text from William Caxton's printing of John Trevisa's 1387 English translation. Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*, trans. John Trevisa, London, 1482.

<sup>71</sup> Kathy Lavezzo has argued that the "angle" in the final sentence should be read as both 'angle' and 'angel.' According to medieval geographical knowledge, Britain was in the northwest corner, or angle, of the known world. On many *mappae mundi* such as the Psalter World Map and the Sawley Map, the world's corners are depicted as having angels hover beside them. Furthermore, this reference alludes to the nationalistic folk etymology for *Anglia* found in Bede and subsequent English sources that tells of young English boys in Rome being mistaken for angels (*anglii*) by Pope Gregory the Great. From this confusion the name *Anglia* was born.

bias should lead us to reconsider the text as a national, rather than world, history.<sup>72</sup> Like the Welsh geographic tradition, the *Polychronicon* argues for an English exceptionalism based on topographical and mythical grounds

Even a quick glance at *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys* reveals stark differences from the *Polychronicon* that transform the Anglocentric medieval text into a staunch defense against early modern attacks on Welsh tradition. *Rhyfeddode'r Ynys* begins, as the *Polychronicon* does, with a retelling of the *llong foel* legend; yet the Welsh translation deviates wildly in many ways from its source text. Whereas Higden's version of the tale emphasizes the virtues of the English, the Welsh chronicle omits any mention of English origin legends, instead elaborating on the legitimacy of the Welsh *llong foel* legend. The same passage in the Welsh translation reads:

*Kyntaf henw a vu ar yr ynys honn oedd Albion sef oedd hynny y wenn ynys achos y creigiau gwynnion a welid o bell gann lann y moroedd nev ynteu o henw Albion verch Danaws val y dywaid Ovydd...a'i [ferched] rhoes [Danaws] mewn llong voel heb hwyl na llywydd arnei ac wedi hir hwylio moroedd onaddunt, hwnt a ddoethant drwy dynghedvenn i'r ynys honn. Ac oblegid bod henw y verch hynaf ynn Albion y gelwid yr Ynys o'i henw hi Albion. Orosiws sydd ynn kytuno ac Ovydd...A phan weles yr ysbrydoedd a elwid Incubos hynny hwynt a ymrithiassant yn rhith dynion ac a gydiassant ac hwynt. Ac val hynny y caad y kowri a'r gwiddonod mawrion trysgolion kreuliad...Socrates a dywaid bod yr ysbrydoedd yn trigo rhwng y ddayar a'r lleuad.*

The first name upon this island was Albion, that is the White Island either because of the white rocks that are seen from afar on the seashore or from the name Albion daughter of Danaus as Ovid says...Danaus put his daughters in a barren ship without sail or wheel on it and after they long sailed the seas in it, fate brought them to this island. And because the name of the eldest daughter was Albion, the island was called Albion after her. Orosius agrees with Ovid...And when the spirits that are called *Incubi* saw them, they took the form of men and slept with them. And thus the large, rude, and cruel giants and giantesses were born...Socrates said that these spirits dwell between the earth and the moon.

To further authenticate the *llong foel* narrative, the author of this Welsh chronicle invents classical references to the legend; he cites Ovid, Orosius, and even Socrates as proof that both giants and incubi existed in Britain. Higden, on the other hand, reports the story "as Galfride saith" and makes no mention of these or other classical sources. The source for these allusions

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<sup>72</sup> Lavezzo, 71-73.

remains unclear: no version of the *llong foel* legend containing these classical references appears in extant manuscript form until the second half of the sixteenth century during the period of greatest Welsh resistance to the attacks of Polydore Vergil.<sup>73</sup> Vergil had denounced Geoffrey because no classical historian could corroborate his claims. This Welsh version averts this problem by appealing to classical authorities, even if they actually say nothing about the history of Brutus and the giants. By refiguring Galfridian narrative as classical narrative, the text attempts to grant medieval Welsh history a Roman pedigree that would legitimize it in the eyes of contemporary historians.

This desire for authentication can be seen most clearly in the coda to the text: the history ends with a passionate plea to Henry VIII, Vergil's patron, to reject those who would deny the truth of medieval Welsh history. Despite Geoffrey's auspicious absence in the *llong foel* section of the chronicle, much of the rest of its text is deeply influenced by the Galfridian tradition. After the origins and etymologies of Britain and Albion are established, what follows is a geographical treatise enumerating the island's wonders, a history of its settlements, and a genealogy of its rulers. Welsh prophecy permeates the chronicle: insular history is depicted as progression of oppressive foreign rulers who will one day be overthrown by the return of a promised king. The chronicler takes great pains to demonstrate Henry's own connection to this tradition by emphasizing his Welsh heritage. He notes that under the rule of the English kings Britain suffered from civil strife; this internal turmoil was only alleviated by the reign of Henry VIII's own father, Henry Tudor, *yr hwn oedd gymro* ("who was a Welshman"). The chronicler elaborates on the Tudors' Welsh lineage, which he traces back to the last native Prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, and through him the legendary rulers of the Welsh pseudohistory:

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<sup>73</sup> Brynley Roberts notes that this version belongs to the first type of *llong foel* legend. The A version of the text is notable for its classical allusions, in particular its references to Ovid, Orosius, and Socrates. Roberts claims that while it is possible that these allusions could stem from a lost version of the *Polychronicon*, *y mae'n llawn mor bosibl mai cronicl anhysbys David Pencair oedd y ffynhonnell* ("it is much more possible that the unknown chronicle of David Pencair was the source"). See Roberts, "Ystori'r Llong Foel," 342-43.

*ef yn wir ettivedd i Llywelyn ap Iorwerth...twyssoc Gwynedd ar un Llywelyn yn ettivedd nessaf i Gadwaladr Vendigaid y brenhin diwaetha o'r Bryttaniaid a veddianodd koron Ynys Brydain...i Dduw vynnu i un o lin Hari Seithved deyrnassu, yr hwnn oedd wir etifedd i'r un Llywely ap Jorwerth. Val y kowssom i ddiolch i Dduw ar Hari Wythved i vab.*

He was truly the heir to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth...prince of Gwynedd and the same Llywelyn who was proper heir to Blessed Cadwaladr, the last king of the Britons who possessed the crown of the Island of Britain...God desires someone from the line of Henry VII to rule, the one who was the true heir to the same Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. Thus, I have given thanks to God for Henry VIII, his son.

The chronicler's interest in Tudor genealogy highlights what exactly is at stake in the historiographical debates of his day. The British past is ultimately the Welsh future for many sixteenth-century historians like the author of this chronicle. The veracity of Galfridian legends such as the giants of Albion establishes a former Welsh hegemony that the Tudors can re-establish. In light of Tudor patronage of Polydore Vergil and others who would denigrate this heritage, Welsh authors felt the need to promote their own vision of this history that reminds Tudor monarchs of their unique place in Welsh history.

The problem many Welsh authors faced in this attempt was the inability to disseminate this information on a level that could compete with their English rivals. Although the sixteenth century saw the rise of the printing press in England, Welsh language printing did not flourish until the eighteenth century. While a handful of Cambro-Latin and Welsh language texts were published during the last half of the sixteenth century (including many that contain defenses of Welsh pseudohistory), the majority of Welsh literature remained relatively inaccessible in manuscript form.<sup>74</sup> Due to the destruction of medieval manuscripts following the Henrician reforms, many Welsh humanists of this period conceived Welsh literary history as "a succession of bibliocausts," and their writings often emphasize the inherent risk in the prospect of preserving knowledge in manuscript form rather than the new print form.<sup>75</sup> Ifan Llwyd ap Dafydd, the author

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<sup>74</sup> For an overview of the influence of the printing press within Wales, see Charles Parry, "From Manuscript to Print: II. Printed Books" in *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1282-1550*, 263-277.

<sup>75</sup> Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory*, 81.

of the late sixteenth-century *Ystorie Kymru, neu Cronigl Kymraeg* (*Stories of Wales, or the Welsh Chronicle*), expressed his fears of the ephemerality and corruptibility of the manuscript compared to the printed book.<sup>76</sup> His chronicle repeats the legend of the destruction of medieval Welsh libraries by Ysgolan, the wicked monk, and suggests that the English have destroyed printed histories that the Welsh have published.<sup>77</sup> He claims:

*nad oedd ddim o ystoriau yn gwlad ni yn bryntiedig, na dim yn iawn perffaith yn  
scrifenedig o herwydd i'r Saeson ddystrowio yn ddyrmygis, drwy dan a chledde,  
fenachlogudd a thau kryfyddawl y Bryttaniaid...a thrachefn hyn ydoedd yn  
scrifenedig i'r oedd hynu mor amherffaith, anghysbell a gwasgaredig*

there are no printed histories in our land, nor ones that are perfectly written because the English destroyed contemptuously, through fire and sword, the monasteries and religious houses of the Britons...and moreover those [histories] that are in manuscripts are so imperfect, remote, and scattered.<sup>78</sup>

However much Ifan criticizes the quality of manuscript sources available to him, he still values the importance of their contents. Unlike John Prise and Elis Gruffydd, who express a sort of humanist reluctance towards corroborating some of the more fantastical episodes of Welsh history, Ifan embraces the marvelous nature of the texts, claiming that *mae yntho lawer o ymrafaelion ystoriau a rheseddodau i dichon y duwiol ar synhwyrol ystyried gwaith Duw ym hob oes, a chymeryd kynghorau a rhybudd o ddiwrthynt* (“in them there are a great variety of stories and wonders that allow the holy and the sensible to consider them the work of God in every age, and take counsel and warning from them”).<sup>79</sup> It is thus unsurprising that Ifan’s chronicle privileges many of the more unbelievable elements of Welsh history such as the Arthurian legend, the prophecies of Merlin, and the aboriginal giants of Albion.

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<sup>76</sup> Ironically, this text still remains mostly unedited in a seventeenth century manuscript, National Library of Wales MS 13B (Llanstephan 129). Partial editions of the text can be found at Garfield Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, pp. 103-04; and Willis and Mittendorf, *Historical Corpus*, <[http://people.pwf.cam.ac.uk/dwew2/hcwl/yk/YK\\_running.htm](http://people.pwf.cam.ac.uk/dwew2/hcwl/yk/YK_running.htm)>.

<sup>77</sup> For more on the Ysgolan legend, see fn. 43 of this chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, 103.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.



The Welsh clergyman and historian David Powel also argued for the symbolic value of traditional history in the face of the challenges that humanistic historiographic models posed. In a 1585 letter to Henry Sidney that prefaced Powel's editions of Ponticus Virunnius's *Historica Britannica* and Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium*, Powel equates the historian's defense of Welsh historical and literary traditions to the military defense of the Welsh land and people. Sidney had spent his youth earning glory through arms, and Powel suggests that he spend his later years in the service of defending the intellectual integrity of Wales.<sup>80</sup> Powel concedes that much of the Welsh historical tradition initially seems difficult to defend, but he assures Sidney that

*haec historia tametsi tota nonnullis commentitia et fabulosis relationibus penitus suffarcinata videatur, habet tamen venerandis antiquitatis suffragationem et doctissimorum uirorum omnis aetatis approbationem et consesum*

although this history may seem wholly invented in parts and completely stuffed with fabulous accounts, it is nevertheless substantiated by venerable antiquities and the approval and consensus of the most learned men of every era.

He disregards concerns that the earliest pre-Roman history of the island is more obscure than the later history for which direct sources exist. Like Richard Prise, he suggests that the value of the folk memory of an ancient people overshadows the value of learned foreign historians who remain separated by language and geographic distance from those whose histories they hope to chronicle. The wondrous elements of folk history should not deter the modern historian from extracting the fundamental truth from its core. He notes that modern historians accept the historical value of equally marvelous Roman and Greek histories and petitions that traditional Welsh history be given the same indulgence: *inter ipsa fabularum figmenta antiquam historiae veritatem agnoscunt et retinent: Cur in nostrae historiae aestimatione non eadem uti debeant aequitatae* ("they recognize and preserve the ancient truth of history within these imaginary stories: why are they not able to use the same impartiality in their estimation of our history?").

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<sup>80</sup> David Powel, *Ponticii Virynii Viri Doctissimi Britannicae Historiae Libri Sex* (London, 1585). A Welsh translation of Powel's introductory letter to Henry Sydney can be found in Ceri Davies, *Rhagymaddrodion*, 48-54.

Powel argues the importance for the historian to dispose of his nationalistic prejudices when approaching his source material. He wishes to demonstrate his own impartiality by balancing his patriotic desire for Welsh historical relevance with international humanistic historiographical standards. In a letter to the English antiquarian William Fleetwood, Powel argues that neither Welsh nor English historians are without biases: while Polydore Vergil and his acolytes are too partial to Roman sources, Welsh historians should exhibit greater skepticism toward the more implausible elements of their history.<sup>81</sup> Powel suggests to Fleetwood that his own work represents a happy medium to these two opposing factions: he puts his faith in the medieval Welsh histories only to the extent that they don't conflict with common sense. He assures Fleetwood that although the earliest British history has been corrupted by wonders and prophecy, this core narrative remains true: the island was inhabited first by giants, then by the early Britons who were ruled by a succession of kings until the coming of the English. Many of the specific details might remain obscure, and the manuscript evidence may be contaminated with questionable interpolations; yet, despite these flaws, the Welsh tradition remains a valuable source for the prehistory of the entire island. However, Powel's *magnum opus*, his 1584 *History of Cambria*, suggests that he did not entirely discard the marvels he formally renounces to Fleetwood. In this history, Powel describes the deeds of Brutus, Merlin, and Arthur; although he does not repeat the story of Albion and the giants, he reports that in the year 1169 the bones of a giant were found on the shores of Wales, suggesting that not only are giants an element of a British past, but that their fossils continue to shape the landscape.<sup>82</sup>

The discrepancy between Powel's letter to Fleetwood and the nature of the history presented in his chronicle can likely be attributed to Fleetwood's own role within the

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<sup>81</sup> Ceri Davies, *Rhagymaddrodion*, 58-63.

<sup>82</sup> David Powel, *The historie of Cambria, now called Wales: a part of the most famous yland of Brytaine, written in the Brytish language aboue two hundreth yeares past: translated into English by H. Lhoyd Gentleman: corrected, augmented, and continued out of records and best approoued authors*, (London, 1584), 225. Edited selections of the *History of Cambria* appear in Schwyzer, ed., *The Breviary of Britain*.

contemporaneous historical debate regarding the origins of Britain. Fleetwood was among a group of English historians who denied the veracity of stories concerning Brutus and the giants and wished to invest Britain with an ancient past independent of Welsh historical legend.<sup>83</sup> During the late sixteenth century, Fleetwood and his contemporaries disseminated new English origin myths that deviated from the Welsh *llong foel* legend; these new narratives rejected the Galfridian tradition and instead merged elements of Biblical apocrypha and Roman mythology to create a new vision of the ancient British past.<sup>84</sup> Particularly popular was the legend that depicted Albion as a giant son of the god Neptune rather than the eponymous mother of the giants.<sup>85</sup> Although most sixteenth-century Welsh historians chose to adhere to the *llong foel* legend in their own works, some combined the new English origin legends with their medieval Welsh counterparts with varying degrees of success. Among them was Humphrey Llwyd, whose *Commentarioli Britannicae descriptionis fragmentum* (translated into English as *The Breviary of Britain* by Thomas Twyne in 1573) reports the conflict regarding the etymology of Albion, which “the Romane Histories do acknowledge as very auncient, and deriued from *Albion*, the Sonne of *Neptune*.”<sup>86</sup> He also notes that others claim that the name stems from the white cliffs bordering the island. Llwyd could be considered the model of the Welsh Renaissance man: he received his education at Oxford and was well known for his connections to European literary circles, in particular his close friendship with the Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius.<sup>87</sup> He wrote about

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<sup>83</sup> J.D. Alsop, “William Fleetwood and Elizabethan Historical Scholarship,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25.1 (1994): 155-76.

<sup>84</sup> T.D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: Methuen, 1950), 69-76.

<sup>85</sup> Neptune does not appear in English pseudohistory until the mid-sixteenth century. His appearance highlights the general Elizabethan interest in neo-Classical forms. However, it is significant that sea god Neptune was chosen among all the Roman gods as the progenitor of the British aboriginal giants. This tradition likely reflects the boom of Atlantic expansion and the subsequent strengthening of British naval identity that influenced English political discourse of the late Tudor Era.

<sup>86</sup> Schwyzer, ed., *The Breviary of Britain*, 54.

Wales for an international audience: the maps he created of his homeland found a place in Ortelius's groundbreaking world atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.<sup>88</sup> His ties to English and continental intellectual communities influenced his writing of Welsh history, and his desire to synthesize various insular origin legends reflects his cosmopolitan worldview. For all his sophistication, however, Llwyd recognized the danger in replacing native mythologies with external ones. He ultimately rejects foreign etymologies of Albion in favor of a Welsh explanation:

I wonder, that men otherwise circumspect enough, could be blinded in such light, as to haue darkened all the names of places, and men, with Latin *Etimologies*, or deriuations...[our origins] are not to be sought out of the Greekes and Latines, but forth of the most auncient Britysh tongue. For, how shamfully the Latines haue corrupted the names of the Kynges, and places of the lande, while they studie for the finesse of their tongue: it is manifest to all those, which being furnished with any skill of the tongues come to reade the Romane histories.<sup>89</sup>

Llwyd's suggestion that the proponents of Roman history have deliberately obscured the Welsh origin of the history and the language of the land echoes Elis Gruffydd's earlier claim that *bod y bobyl seissnig drwy j souesdri...ddalu yn koel an meuerdod ni ac j geissshio genym ni gredu a choelio megis ac j mae y hran vvia o honoaunt twy yn koelio ac yn kredu* ("the English people through their sophistry...blind our belief and learning and try to make us think and believe as the majority of them think and believe").<sup>90</sup> Both authors are threatened by the growth of English interest in what they perceive as their own national origin story, whether in the form of Rastell and Vergil's repudiation of the Albina legend or in the appropriation of overly eager English historians wishing to create an independent mythology for the new British state.

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<sup>87</sup> For more on Humphrey Llwyd's biography, see R. Brinley Jones, "Llwyd, Humphrey (1527–1568)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online ed., May 2007 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16867>, accessed 22 Nov 2013>.

<sup>88</sup> Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Antwerp, 1570). Llwyd's map, entitled *Cambriae Typus*, is included in the *Additamentum* to the atlas published in 1573.

<sup>89</sup> Schywzer, *Breviary*, 55.

<sup>90</sup> Elis Gruffydd, qtd. in Hunter, 68.

## ENGLISH NEO-CLASSICAL MYTHS OF ALBION

Throughout the sixteenth century, Welsh, English, and British identities competed for dominance, and the field of Galfridian history was their battleground. This period saw an increase in insular origin stories that denied or revised the Galfridian narrative in order to reflect the multinational nature of the new British state. Often, Welsh elements of this narrative were deliberately excised or given a Roman coloring.<sup>91</sup> Of course, I do not wish to impose an uncomplicated dichotomy between English and Welsh historians: English and Welsh texts were often in dialogue with one another, and many of the most spirited defenses of Welsh pseudohistory came from the pens of Englishmen.<sup>92</sup> The earliest of these came from the poet and antiquarian John Leland who argued for the Galfridian tradition in both manuscript and print form. His published defense, the 1544 *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii regis Britannia* (translated into English in 1582 as *A learned and true assertion of the original, life, actes, and death of the most noble, valiant, and renoumed Prince Arthure, King of great Brittain*) primarily concerns itself with the character of Arthur, whom Leland considered the emblematic figure for the possibility of a glorious British past. Leland also briefly defends the legend of the giants of Albion and their defeat by Brutus. He asserts that historical evidence exists for these giants in the presence of giant graves that can be found along the coast. Discussing the controversy surrounding the location of Arthur's grave, he states: "vndoubtedly in mine opinion it is more credible that it was the graue of some *Gyant* inhabitinge the countrie. For that first such did inhabit *Albion*, it appeareth both by auctoritie of forraine and of our own writers."<sup>93</sup> He cites the poetry of a certain Josephus of

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<sup>91</sup> The Neo-Classical elements introduced into the British origin legend during the latter half of the sixteenth century reflect general trends in British historiography that increasingly disregarded folkloric and 'local' histories in favor of Neo-Classical national narratives, as Daniel Woolf has effectively argued in *The Social Circulation of the Past*.

<sup>92</sup> For more on English support of the Galfridian legend, see Jarman, "Y Ddadl," 5-6.

<sup>93</sup> John Leland, *A learned and true assertion of the original, life, actes, and death of the most noble, valiant, and renoumed Prince Arthure, King of great Brittain*, trans. Richard Robinson, (London, 1582).

Devonshire as proof of the ancient presence of giants in the island and hearkens back to the Trojan origins of Britain: “A Troian Brute by auncient bloude, ariued from Romane roade/ After sundry hazardes, and here in these coastes aboade/ And hauing got his destned land, subdued the Gyants fell/ As Conquerour he left his fame vpon the earth to dwell.” Leland also lists Corineus’s fight with Gogmagog as well as more contemporary stories of giant footprints as proof that giants existed within Britain. Other English historians sympathetic to the Galfridian tradition, such as William Harrison, echoed Leland’s belief in the existence of an aboriginal race of British giants.<sup>94</sup> In his *Historical Description of the Island of Britain* (published as an introduction to the 1577 edition of Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicle of England, Scotland, and Ireland*), Harrison devotes an entire chapter to endorsing the existence of giants, claiming: “I haue nowe taken vpon me to make thys briefe discourse insuing, thereby to prooue, that the opinion of Gyaunts is not altogether grounded vpon vayne and fabulous narrations, inuented only to delite the eares of the hearer with the report of marveilous things.”<sup>95</sup> Harrison not only defends the tradition of the prehistoric giants of Britain, but also alludes to accounts of giant corpses washing up on its shores in more recent times.

The notion of the continuity of British prehistory was deeply important to many sixteenth-century Galfridian apologists: for these scholars, the ancient past continued to live in the language, blood, and landscape of the modern Welsh people. For example, Leland, who according to his friend and fellow antiquarian John Bale was proficient in Welsh, expressed a fascination with the Welsh language, which he saw as a direct link to the language of Brutus.<sup>96</sup> However, Leland’s respect for Welsh language sources was uncommon among English antiquarians of the later sixteenth century. English enthusiasm for Welsh historical legend was

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<sup>94</sup> Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity*, 110-12.

<sup>95</sup> William Harrison, “Historical Description of the Island of Britain” in Raphael Holinshed, *The firste volume of the chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London, 1577).

<sup>96</sup> Carley, 189.

often misplaced: although some authors privileged the Welsh as living relics of the British past, they were less concerned with the preservation of Welsh culture and language. The poetry of Arthur Kelton of Shrewsbury, for example, stresses the genetic relationship between Brutus and Welshmen living in his own time while simultaneously appropriating the Cambro-British origin legend in order to serve nationalist English propaganda.<sup>97</sup> Much has been made of Kelton's national identity: although A.O.H. Jarman described him as *Cymro cyntaf i ateb Polydore Virgil* ("the first Welshman to answer Polydore Vergil"), others such as Brynley Roberts, Phillip Schwyzer, and A.H. Dodd have been reluctant to assign him a Welsh, rather than English, identity.<sup>98</sup> He was born in the Cambrophone border city of Shrewsbury and had at least one Welsh grandparent.<sup>99</sup> Yet Kelton himself appears to have known very little Welsh, and despite the ever-present references to "we Welshmen" throughout his work, he appears primarily interested in winning royal favor by lauding the Tudors' British ancestry. Although Kelton self-identifies as Welsh, his tendency to fetishize the modern Welsh people as distant, living fossils of an English past elucidates his true national alliances.

While Kelton's poetry employs much of the same imagery as the histories of Humphrey Llwyd, David Powel, and other Welshmen, these works tell fundamentally different narratives regarding the foundation of the island of Britain. Unlike these contemporaneous antiquarians who upheld medieval tradition to promote the historical importance of the Welsh nation, Kelton infuses his origin tale with neo-classical elements that often overshadow the native legends of Brutus and the Trojans. He traces Brutus's lineage back to the Egyptian god Osiris through the

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<sup>97</sup> Arthur Kelton, *A commendacyon of Welshmen*, (London, 1546); and Ibid., *A chronycle with a genealogie declaryng that the Brittons and Welshemen are linealiye dyscended from Brute* (London, 1578). See also A.H. Dodd, "A Commendation of Welshmen," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 19 (1961): 235-49.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts, "Sieffre o Fynwy," 28; Dodd, 255-49; Jarman, "Y Ddadl," 7-8; and Schwyzer, "Kelton, Arthur (d. 1549/50)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online ed., May 2007, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15307>>, accessed 22 Nov 2013>.

<sup>99</sup> Dodd, 235. For more on the presence of the status of Welsh in Shrewsbury in the sixteenth century, see Llinos Beverley Smith, "The Welsh Language before 1536" in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, Ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 19.

hero Hercules, claiming for him a Near Eastern semi-divine genealogy. Kelton argues that this noble and exotic blood still courses through Welsh veins. He describes Brutus as:

The seede, the frute  
The name and language  
The playne discent  
The nourishment  
Of the Welshmen's lineage

Thus may ye se  
That Welshmen be  
Of the blood imperiall  
Of nature fre  
Cosyns in degre  
To the goddess immortal<sup>100</sup>

Immortal blood is not the only defining trait of the Welshman's heritage. Giants and giant-slayers feature prominently in Kelton's poetry, although they too are transformed into figures from classical mythology. According to Kelton, the giants of Britain are related to the Greek Titans whom he claims Osiris and Hercules battled as well as the other races of gigantic monsters found throughout Africa and the Mediterranean. He depicts Brutus's defeat of the giants as one of the most important links between the British hero and his mythological ancestors. The poet recalls elements of the Albina legend in his retelling of Brutus's arrival to Britain and the destruction of the aboriginal giants:

Within this region  
Called Albion  
Wher Gyauntes did dwell  
As I do fine  
Of Cerberus kinde  
Fearce, odius, and cruell

Engendered they weare  
By sprites of the ayre  
Or by some fiends infernall  
So terryble  
So horryble  
Were they of nature all

For all ther stature  
Of dredfull figure

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<sup>100</sup> Kelton, *A Commendation of Welshmen*.



Brute nothing abashed  
By furieuse strength  
Slewe them at lengthe  
And thys land possessed<sup>101</sup>

Kelton reiterates many of the essential elements of the native legend: before the arrival of Brutus and the Trojans, fierce giants born from incubi roamed the land, and their defeat by these newcomers granted the British control over the island. However, the same neo-classical influence that colors his portrayal of Brutus can also be found in this passage: the giants are likened to Cerberus, the three-headed hellhound of Greek and Roman mythology, and Brutus to Hercules, who was tasked with slaying the infernal beast.

Despite his apparent support for Welsh pseudohistory, Kelton views his sources as elastic texts that he can manipulate as his politics or imagination require. Although he devotes much of his work to his belief that Brutus's bloodline continues to flourish in the average Welshman, he consistently portrays Wales as a site of history, not a viable contemporary political entity. The heroes and giants of Wales belong to the same class of narrative as stories of Hercules and Cerberus. For Kelton, Wales and its people are fossilized in time: they represent the past and have no access to the future. He casually refers to Wales as a former name of England, a name that no longer applies after the Acts of Union. Discussing the establishment of English law in Wales, he claims: "Among the mountaynes, hilles, and vales/ Now is it England, sometime called Wales...Privleged we ar, with the lawes of England."<sup>102</sup> Moreover, Kelton argues, Brutus's nobility is realized not in the Welsh people, but rather in the Tudor kings. For the poet, Henry VII's battle at Bosworth and his subsequent coronation had brought about the beginning of the end of Welsh history, and with the Acts of Union, his son Henry VIII had completed it, subsuming Welsh lore under a new Anglocentric British history of the island. Wales was now

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Kelton, *A chronycle with a genealogie declaryng that the Brittons and Welshemen are linealiye dyscended from Brute*.

England, sharing “one lawe, one king, one deuinite/ one faithe, one hope, one erudiction,/ one mynde, one will, one intention.”<sup>103</sup> Kelton subordinates Welsh history to the Tudor mythos, which is embodied by the reign of Henry VIII, “right full kyng of Britayne called England.”<sup>104</sup> This conflation of England, Wales, and Britain can also be seen in the works of self-consciously English historians who confuse the terms in order to suggest that Welsh antiquity functions merely as the prehistory of the English state. Cathy Shrank has argued that such works often de-emphasize linguistic and topographical distinctions within Britain in order to create the illusion of a unified English whole. She states: “The poetry smothers any sense of a geographically, culturally, or politically divided realm. England and Wales are fashioned into a compact body, in which Snowdonia hears the nymphs paying homage to Edward at Hampton Court.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Kelton erases national differences to construct a political fiction in which the Welsh past is incorporated into an English present.

Kelton’s narrative embodies the contradictory nature of many sixteenth-century English histories of pre-Roman Britain: it glorifies Welsh historical tradition only in so far as it can buttress an English-centered common insular identity. Although Kelton describes the giants who roam Albion, like most other English historians of his time Kelton omits Albina and her sisters entirely. Anke Bernau has shown that Albina (or Albion, as she was sometimes named) fell out of fashion in English historiographical circles in the early sixteenth century and was replaced by less feminized foundation myths.<sup>106</sup> Yet despite Albina’s own disappearance from English chronicles, the stories about her giant offspring remained, and historians of the period proposed several new

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Kelton, *A Commendation of Welshmen*.

<sup>105</sup> Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86.

<sup>106</sup> Bernau, 112-116. Bernau argues that although Albina’s rule produced nothing but monsters who are easily conquered by the hypermasculine Brutus, the fact that Britain’s earliest founder and eponymous ruler was a woman concerned male historians. Bernau notes that the disappearance of Albina corresponds with the growth of Boudica’s popularity in the histories, a figure who served many of the same rhetorical functions as Albina without the complications of being the island’s founder.

origin legends for the aboriginal giants that strayed far from the *llong foel* legend. At the same time the *llong foel* narrative was gaining popularity among Welsh humanists, English historians were rejecting it in favor of new syncretic histories. Often these new foundation myths were entirely divorced from the Galfridian tradition and emphasized to varying degrees the biblical, classical, and Saxon origins of the island. For example, during the sixteenth century, foundation legends such as the stories of Samothēs, the son of Japhet who discovered Britain after the Flood, and the myth of the Fortunate Isles first appear.<sup>107</sup> Antiquarians such as William Camden attempted to find the distinctive Saxon roots of the island.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, Kelton's elaborate genealogy seeks the genesis of the British nation in Egyptian gods and Greek heroes, reflecting the growing trend to integrate British history into classical mythology.

Among the most common pseudo-classical legends to emerge in the works of the sixteenth-century English historians was the legend of Albion, the son of the Roman god Neptune who established the race of giants in Britain. Although some Welsh historians such as Humphrey Llwyd incorporated elements of the Albion narrative into their histories, the story remained a primarily English phenomenon. In his 1586 *Albion's England*, William Warner replaces the legend of Albion and her sisters entirely with the legend of Albion, son of Neptune. He claims that the original inhabitants of the island were "huge Gyants feerce and strong/ Of the race of *Albion, Neptuns sonne* (els some deriue them wrong)."<sup>109</sup> While Warner acknowledges the controversy surrounding the designation of Albion son of Neptune as the father of the giants, he quickly dismisses the possibility that other interpretations could be more accurate. Like Kelton,

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<sup>107</sup> Kendrick, 69-71; Katherine Duncan-Jones, "Sidney in Samothēa: A Forgotten National Myth," *The Review of English Studies* 25 (1974): 174-77; Josephine Waters Bennett, "Britain among the Fortunate Isles," *Studies in Philology* 53.2 (1956): 114; Herbert Grabes, "'Elect Nation': The Founding Myth of National Identity" in *Writing the Early Modern English Nation: The Transformation of National Identity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, Ed. Herbert Grabes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 181-83.

<sup>108</sup> Uhlig, 101-03.

<sup>109</sup> William Warner, *Albion's England* (London, 1586).

Warner composes a history in which “the gests of Brutons stoute” are replaced by the “acts of Englishmen.” This pattern of replacement defines even the English histories most sympathetic to the Galfridian tradition. For example, William Harrison subordinates Galfridian tradition to biblical and classical apocrypha in his retelling of the founding of Britain.<sup>110</sup> He claims that the first inhabitants of the island belonged to the family not of Albina but of Samothēs, whom he describes as the leader of a prosperous and fruitful “Celtike kingdome.” Hearing of the great bounty available in Britain, the jealous giant Albion travels to the island; he soon overcomes the Celtic kingdom and changes its name to Albion. According to Harrison, the giant ruled for only seven years before being defeated by Hercules, whom he claims ruled Britain in the giant’s stead.<sup>111</sup> Despite Albion’s short reign, his memory was preserved in the island’s name and in his monstrous progeny until the arrival of Brutus eradicated both. Although Harrison incorporates some elements of the *llong foel* legend into his own origin myth, he ultimately dismisses it in favor of the story of Hercules and Albion.<sup>112</sup> Harrison’s account is particularly damaging to the Welsh historical tradition: not only does the historian deny the traditional story of the *adventus Bruti*, he replaces it with the story of the conquest of a Celtic people at the hands of a gigantic demigod. In this narrative, the Welsh are stripped of their Trojan glory and transformed into a conquered race of ancient Celts.

Not every English historian accepted these new legendary origins: some English authors of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries followed the earlier lead of John Rastell and

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<sup>110</sup> Harrison, “Historical Description” in Holinshed.

<sup>111</sup> Gordon McMullan, “The colonization of early Britain on the Jacobean stage” in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, 136-37.

<sup>112</sup> It is worth mentioning that stories concerning Hercules have appeared in Welsh literature since the Middle Ages. A biographical poem can be found in the Book of Taliesin, and references to the Greek hero appear throughout the corpus of bardic poetry as well as the Triads. Elis Gruffydd also includes the story of Hercules in his *Cronicl Chwech Oes y Byd*. Despite Hercules’s general popularity, however, the legend of Albion and Hercules does not seem to have been popular among the Welsh *litterati*. For more on Elis Gruffydd’s Hercules narrative, see fn. 10 of this chapter.

Polydore Vergil and denied the more fabulous aspects of British history regardless of their source. In his *Poly-Olbion*, Michael Drayton rejects all forms of the Albion legend:

From *Albina*, daughter to the King of *Syria* some fetch the name: others from a Lady of that name...affirming their arriuall here, copulation with spirits, and bringing forth Giants; and all this about CC. yeares before *Brute*. But neyther was there any such King in *Syria*, nor had *Danaus* (that can be found) any such daughter, nor trauelled they for adventures, but by their father were newly married, after slaughter of their husbands: briefly, nothing can bee written more impudently fabulous. Others from *Albion*, *Neptunes* sonne...others, or from (I know not what) *Olibius* a Celtish King...I thinke cleerely (against the common opinion) that the name of *Britain* was knowne to strangers before *Albion*.<sup>113</sup>

Drayton acknowledges the variety of national and ethnic divisions that define the discourse of British historiography, and by rejecting all of them, he makes a claim for a united Britain, the *Poly-Olbion* that the title suggests.<sup>114</sup> In Drayton's text, however, British union is not egalitarian; instead, it comes at the cost of silencing non-English histories and cultures.

Like Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, John Speed's chorographical treatise *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* outwardly appeals to the Jacobean project of forming a Great Britain from the disparate nations of England, Scotland, and Wales; and like Drayton, Speed does so through marginalizing its Welsh components. Speed designates the earliest Britons as "so far cast into the misty darknesse of obscurity and obliuion...there is no hope left vs so lately borne to discover them."<sup>115</sup> Whereas English and Scottish history is recoverable, Speed argues, Welsh history has been lost and must remain unspoken: the Welsh and their history are fossilized. Nowhere is this difference between English and Welsh history more clearly defined than in the design of the frontispiece of Speed's work. Much has been made of the image, which serves as a visual representation of the multifaceted history of the island.<sup>116</sup> The frontispiece depicts five

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<sup>113</sup> Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, 19.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Hadfield, "Spenser, Drayton, and the Question of Britain," *The Review of English Studies* 51 (2000): 593-95.

<sup>115</sup> Speed, 5.

images, each of which illustrates a period of British history. Four of these images, the Roman, Saxon, Dane, and Norman, are virtually indistinguishable from each other: all are dressed as noblemen, wearing elaborate armor and posing with their arms. The Briton, however, is presented as a hirsute rustic giant who towers above his more civilized replacements. While the others are dressed in finery, the Briton wears only rags, and his bare skin is covered in tattoos. This image suggests that the ancestors of the Welsh had less in common with Brutus and the Trojan than with the giants they supposedly slew.

The alternative to Speed's marginalization of the Welsh is their complete erasure from British history. The frontispiece to the *Poly-Olbion* speaks to this threat. Drayton's frontispiece recreates the same image as *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* with one glaring exception: in the place of the giant Briton, an allegorical representation of Britannia as a young woman holding a cornucopia and surrounded by angels appears.<sup>117</sup> If the Britons were monsters in the iconography of Speed's *Theatre*, they cease to exist in that of Drayton. Discussing the erasure of minority narratives in national discourse, Homi Bhabha has suggested that "[t]o be obliged to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will."<sup>118</sup> If national history must choose which events deserve commemoration in the collective memory, conversely it must decide which events to disregard. For many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English historians, the creation of a new unified British history necessitated either the dismissal or disappearance of an old Welsh British history. Welsh historians wishing to promote the continued relevance of the Welsh historical

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<sup>116</sup> See Richard Helgersen, "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England," *Representations* 16 (1986): 63-4; and Christopher Ivic, "Mapping British Identities: Speed's *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*" in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, 140-42.

<sup>117</sup> Helgersen has noted that the image also shares affinities with traditional depictions of both Queen Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary (60-62).

<sup>118</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *Nation and Narration*, Ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 311.

tradition had to contend not only with the likes of doubters such as Polydore Vergil, but also their fellow English historians who would relegate their history and, indeed their identity, to the dustbin of time.

### THE HISTORY OF SIÔN DAFYDD RHYS

Faced with the danger of cultural assimilation brought about by English historical revisionism, many Welsh authors fully embraced the most fantastic elements of their pseudohistorical traditions. In doing so, they firmly situated themselves in the long Welsh tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages whereby native *mirabilia* was promoted in response to external political threats. If English authors such as Drayton and Speed were intent on demonstrating the obsolescence of the Galfridian heroes and giants, Welsh humanists were equally determined to show how the British past continued to exert a palpable presence in the language and landscape of contemporary Wales. Although many Welsh authors of the sixteenth century endorsed medieval giant lore, no one did so more zealously than the polymath Siôn Dafydd Rhys. In a lengthy manuscript *apologia* for Geoffrey of Monmouth, Rhys collects giant lore from Welsh and foreign literature and folklore in order to fashion a narrative in which the deeds of giants serve as the guiding force of historical progress.<sup>119</sup> Written in 1597, Rhys's treatise echoes the works of other Welsh scholars such as John Prise and Humphrey Llwyd as he counters attacks on traditional Welsh historiography, in particular the legends of the Trojan settlement of Britain and the remarkable deeds of Brutus's ancestors. However, Rhys's defense of the giants of Britain approaches the English and continental criticisms of Welsh pseudohistory in a unique manner. While many sixteenth-century Welsh humanists expressed belief in the legends

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<sup>119</sup> The whole text can be found in National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 118 as well as in an unpublished diplomatic edition composed in 1974 by Ffred Ffrancis and corrected by R. Geraint Gruffydd (NLW, MS 21825E). Excerpts of the list of giants have been edited and published in Hugh Owen, ed., "Peniarth Ms. 118, fols. 829-837," *Y Cymmrodor* 27 (1917): 115-152; and T.H. Parry-Williams, "Olion Cewri" in *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg I* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1954), 130-32. A diplomatic edition of a larger selection of Rhys's manuscript can be found in the appendix to Chris Grooms, *The Giants of Wales*, 241-317.

of the giants of Albion and included versions of the *llong foel* legend in their own histories, none defended the existence of giants as thoroughly as Rhys, who devotes a third of his treatise to the exploits of giants both in Britain and abroad. He synthesizes such diverse elements as Galfridian history, classical mythology, early modern travelogues, and Welsh folklore, relying on aspects of each to prove that giants have existed since biblical times and continue to exist in his own time (*hedhiw a heno*).<sup>120</sup>

Although Rhys admits that stories of giants might seem to be fictional embellishments in the eyes of the modern reader, he insists that their presence in both written medieval texts and oral folk memory verifies their existence.<sup>121</sup> For Rhys, giants represent something fundamental about Welsh history: they are as essential as Brutus in the Welsh national consciousness, and the defense of their existence is imperative to all who hope to defend Welsh history from its detractors. Rhys writes:

*rhaid i ni, er mwyn coelgred i'r hystoria gymraeg yn y pyghciev hynn, dhangos  
bod gynt a bod hedhiw a heno y bhath aghhenbhilaidh a thrwsCleidh ryw ar  
dhynion o rann cyrph ac o rann arbheron*

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<sup>120</sup> Grooms, 288. All references to Rhys's text refer to Groom's edition unless otherwise mentioned. All translations are my own.

<sup>121</sup> The level to which Rhys admits oral testimony and folkloric stories as evidence in his case for the giants is significant. A common theme throughout the text is the reliability of oral testimony, which he considers equal in authority to written history. Rhys argues that the existence of giants can be confirmed by both types of evidence and consistently reiterates that he has consulted both *peth drwy gobh yscribhennedic, a pheth drwy gobh diyscribhen* ("things through written memory and things through unwritten memory") (254) in his examination. Furthermore, he frames his account as an oral performance, repeatedly referring readers to points made earlier in his treatise as stories *mal y clywsoch* ("as you have heard"). Geraint Gruffydd has attributed this affinity for oral tradition and fantastic tales to Rhys's covert Catholicism, an affinity that Alexandra Walsham has suggested was shared among British Counter-Reformation preachers and scholars. While Rhys's Catholicism certainly informs many of his writings, in this instance I believe that his admittance of oral testimony aligns closely with the Protestant strains of Welsh humanism discussed above. Both Catholic and Protestant Welsh humanists expressed deep concern that their national history was disregarded because it had disappeared from the historical record, and both factions sought to rectify this problem through the inclusion of non-written sources. In many ways, Rhys's appeal to folk memory mirrors his Protestant counterparts' use of the Ysgolan legend, itself a legend without any concrete textual basis before the early sixteenth century. See Gruffydd, "The Renaissance and Welsh Literature," 34-35; and Alexandra Walsham, "Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England," *The Historical Journal* 46.4 (2003): 779-815.



we must, for the sake of the credibility of Welsh history in these topics, show that there were in the past and there are today monstrous and strange kinds of men on account of their bodies and their customs.<sup>122</sup>

More than ever before in the Welsh historiographical tradition, Rhys entangles the “monstrous and strange” bodies of the giants with the concept of Welsh national identity. If English historians such as Drayton and Speed doubt the *llong foel* legend, Rhys suggests that Welsh historians must respond in kind by demonstrating that the history of giants influenced the history of not only Britain, but also the world.

It is not surprising that Rhys engages in a passionate defense of the *llong foel* legend in his own history of the foundation of Britain.<sup>123</sup> He concedes that the origin story he presents is controversial; although he acknowledges that not all historians agree with his version of events, he notes that *rai dyscedig* (“the learned ones”) support his claims.<sup>124</sup> He includes among these learned historians the late medieval Englishmen John Rous and John Hardyng; however, he ultimately locates the authority of the tale in the elusive Welsh historian David Pencair, whom he designates *hystorydh o’r ynys* “historian of the island.”<sup>125</sup> Rhys claims that despite the current vogue for alternative foundation stories, in particular those that feature Albion son of Neptune and Hercules, older Welsh legends have stronger claims to authenticity. In fact, Rhys purposefully juxtaposes the two narratives to contrast their antiquity and what he perceives as their comparative authority. He writes:

*y damchweiniawdh i’r arglwydhes Albina nev Albiona dhybhod i rann o’r ynys  
yghhyd ai chweorydh...Yr rhain holh a adrodhant hystoria rhianedh nev  
arglwydhesseu y lhogh bhoel...A Nennius hybhyd vn o ysgribhennydhion y  
Brutanieid yn yscribhennv yghhylchen naw cant bhlwynydhev a aethant heibiaw,  
a gyrbwylhawdh a dhybhodiad a chyrch y dec a devgeint merched nev rianedh y  
lhogh bhoel i ynys prydein. A henwev yr holh dheu a devgeint bherched hynny o*

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<sup>122</sup> Grooms, 250.

<sup>123</sup> Rhys’s telling of the *llong foel* legend can be found in NLW, Peniarth MS 118, ff. 732-735. It has not yet been edited for publication. All references to this section of the text refer directly to the manuscript.

<sup>124</sup> Pen. 118, f. 733.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., f. 733.

*eidhaw Danaus a adrodhant Higinus a Pausanius ac ereilh...y gyntabh o'r merched nev r arglwydhessev hynny yn lhybhrev yr awdurieid hynn a elwid Dea, a thrwy drodhod gyphredin chwedyl a chobh diyscribhen o enev i enev yr henwid hi Albina ac Albiona....Ac o ethryb bod y rhiaid honn yn gwledychv gynt ar rann o'r ynys yma, rhai o'r yscribhennydhion a bhynant gael o ynys Prydein ei galw yn Albion nyd yn vnic o enw Albion gawr, namwyn hebhyd o enw yr arglwydhes Albiona.*

It happened that the lady Albina, or Albiona, came to part of the island together with her sisters...All these [John Hardyng, John Rous, and David Pencair] report a story of a queen or ladies in a barren ship...And Nennius also was one of the writers of the Britons who wrote about nine hundred years ago, and who mentioned the arrival and the journey of the fifty girls or maidens in the barren ship to the Island of Britain. And the names of all fifty daughters of Danaus were reported by Higden, Pausanias, and others...the oldest of these daughters or ladies in the books of these authors is named Dea, and through the transmission of common fable and unwritten memory from mouth to mouth, she was named Albina and Albiona...and because these queens reigned over part of this island in the past, some of the writers wished to give the name Albion to the Island of Britain, not only from the name of the giant Albion [son of Neptune], but also from the name of the lady Albiona.<sup>126</sup>

Like Gruffudd Hiraethog's chronicle found in Peniarth MS163ii, Rhys attempts to validate the *llong foel* through dubious references to classical authors. Yet, unlike the earlier chronicle, Rhys places equal authority in his Welsh sources. Where Gruffudd's chronicle obscured the legend's connections to Welsh pseudohistory, Rhys emphasizes these ties, not only in his references to Nennius and David Pencair, but also in his celebration of Welsh folkloric memory. In fact, Rhys claims that the Welsh oral tradition offers a corrective to both English and classical traditions: although Higden and Pausanius refer to the eldest daughter as Dea, the Welsh people have remembered the daughter's true name of Albina or Albiona, which they have preserved in their "common fables and unwritten memory." Rhys dismisses origin legends fashionable in English circles and suggests truth can only be found in the ancient tales of the Welsh people. John Prise and others had rued the loss of imagined Welsh-language manuscripts that would provide concrete textual evidence for Galfridian legend. Rhys, on the other hand, suggests that the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., ff. 733-34.

physical remains of these books are unnecessary: the collective memory of the Welsh is a text from which the hidden depths of antiquity can be drawn.

Despite his strong sense of Welsh identity and desire for the promotion of Welsh oral and written history, Siôn Dafydd Rhys was above all a humanist engaged with international intellectual currents: the clear influence of contemporaneous English historians like Holinshed, Camden, and Drayton underlies most of his work.<sup>127</sup> For example, in the above passage, Rhys doesn't entirely reject the story of Albion, son of Neptune, but instead notes that the story of the *llong foel* has greater significance due to its age and its perceived Welsh connections. Like Humphrey Llwyd before him, Rhys augments his vision of Welsh traditional history with certain elements of popular English origin narratives. In both Llwyd's and Rhys's histories, the stories of Albion Gawr and Hercules merge with the Galfridian account of Brutus and the Trojans, the pseudo-Galfridian legend of Albion and her sisters, and the apocryphal tale of Samothres to create a hybrid text that extends the pattern of advent and conquest back to the immediately post-Diluvian era. At first, this approach may seem contradictory to Rhys's stated aims of advancing the Welsh historical tradition in the face of its English and continental detractors. However, rather than effacing the Welsh historical tradition by including its English counterparts, Rhys deftly incorporates the latter into the former, suggesting that all British origin legends ultimately have their roots in Welsh memory, if not written record. Rhys eagerly consolidates all accounts of giants into a single narrative of Welsh geographic and historical exceptionalism. In the above example, Rhys incorporates Albion Gawr into the Welsh origin legend while at the same time subordinating him to the legend of Albina and her sisters. He treats the legend of Samothres

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas Parry, "Siôn Dafydd Rhys," *Y Llenor* 9 (1930): 157-65, 234-41; and *Ibid.*, *Y Llenor* 10 (1931): 35-46. For more on the relationship of Welsh humanist circles to their English and continental counterparts, see Ceri Davies, *Latin Writers of the Renaissance* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981).

similarly by emphasizing Samothēs's genetic connection to Gomer, the eponymous biblical ancestor of the Welsh people.<sup>128</sup>

The imagined relationship between Gomer, son of Japhet, and the Welsh was quite novel at the time of Rhys's writing: one of the earliest appearances of Gomer as the progenitor of the Welsh first appeared in Camden's *Britannica*, published only a decade before the completion of Rhys's own history. Camden marginalizes Gomer and his descendants, describing them as bound to "these farthest and remotest borders of Europe."<sup>129</sup> In contrast, Rhys celebrates the geographic and cultural distance between the Gomerians and the rest of Europe. In Rhys's retelling, the Gomerians exist among the natural wonders of the island and battle for supremacy against giants; in fact, Rhys suggests that the Gomerians themselves possessed incredible strength and were of a remarkable size, refashioning them as a race of benevolent giants fighting the wicked race of Albion Gawr. He describes them as:

*y Gymry gleinion, ac yn ardherchogion o nerth corph ac o rinwedhev da y medhwl, a'i bod o'r achaws hynny yn rhagori ac yn pennaethv o bhywn amryw leoedh yn ynys Prydein ar y dynion erailh*

The fair Welshmen, noblemen with strong bodies and virtuous minds, and because of that, they excelled and ruled in various places in the Isle of Britain over other men."<sup>130</sup>

By tracing Welsh roots to the Gomerians, Rhys endows the Welsh with a double ownership over Britain: not only are they the descendants of the noble Trojan Britons, but they also are directly related to its earliest gigantic settlers.

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<sup>128</sup> Interest in the biblical origins of the Welsh were also finding popularity at this time. The figure of Gomer, son of Japhet, featured in genealogies seeking to establish the connections between the Welsh and the family of Noah. Likewise, Welsh grammarians argued for the phonetic and structural similarities between Welsh and Hebrew and suggested that Welsh was among the several languages spoken at the Tower of Babel. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194-98. For more on the perceived relationship between Welsh and Hebrew, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>129</sup> Camden, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Pen.118, ff. 734-35.

The Welsh genetic connection to a race of benevolent, aboriginal giants allows Rhys to defend not only the Galfridian tradition, but also elements of the Welsh native tradition against foreign detractors. Like many of his fellow Welsh historians, Rhys concerns himself with the etymologies of the various names of the island. As noted above, he combines aspects of Galfridian and sixteenth-century English legends to establish Welsh origins for the name Albion. However, unlike his fellow historians, Rhys does not accept the possibility that the name derives from the Roman name for the White Cliffs of Dover or its Welsh cognate, *yr Wen Ynys*. He believes the name Albion to be an eponym, not a toponym. Rhys reminds his reader that although these names do appear in the Welsh historical record, the Welsh literary and oral records reveal that the island was also called, *Ynys y Cewri* “the Island of Giants,” or *Ynys y Cedyrn* “the Island of the Mighty.”<sup>131</sup> Rhys hearkens back to the stories of giants found within the corpus of medieval Welsh prose to advance yet another alternative history to prevailing English origin narratives. He claims:

*bhod bhath dhynion a elwid cewri nev gewri a gwidhonod nev widhanod gwryw  
a benyw o'r enrhybhedhys dhynion hynn yn cybhanedhv gynt...ac o'r achaws  
hynny y gelwid yn Ynys y Cewri ac yn ynys Cedyrn*

that a kind of men called giants and giantesses, males and females of this wondrous race, dwelled here before...and because of that it is called the Island of the Giants and the Island of the Mighty.<sup>132</sup>

Although he does not specifically name texts such as the *Mabinogi* and the Triads as his sources, this terminology directly references the pre-Saxon name of the island in both those traditions. Of particular interest is Rhys's assertion that the island was called *ynys Cedyrn* (“Island of the Mighty”): the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi* states that Britain was known as *Ynys y Kedeirn* (“Island of the Mighty”) during the reign of Bendigeidfran, another benevolent giant king who defends his people against cruel invaders.

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<sup>131</sup> Grooms, 250.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

As I have shown in Chapter One of this dissertation, giants within the Welsh native tradition have a complex relationship to their human counterparts. While some giants like Ysbadadden conform to monstrous stereotypes, others like Bendigeidfran heroically defend Wales against attack. Others, such as the race of Irish giants in the Second Branch or the *gwŷr du mawr* of romance, play a more ambiguous role in society, performing both acts of aggression and acts of kindness. What is clear in these texts is that the motivations of giants are every bit as varied as those of humans: just as the human race is neither entirely good nor evil, neither are the giants. Rhys explicitly incorporates this distinctly Welsh viewpoint into his treatise, going as far as to explain that *nad drycdhynion oedhynt y cewri* (“the giants weren’t wicked men”).<sup>133</sup> Although Rhys describes some giants as *gormesoedh*, or oppressions, in general he views giants positively; the giants in his history more closely resemble the morally complex giants of the native narrative tradition than faceless monsters to be found in European geographical lore. In fact, Rhys positions giants as essential members of society whose deeds have shaped the history of the ancient and the modern world. Although he numbers such legendary figures as Gomer and Arthur among the giants, he also includes historical rulers such as Constantine the Great and William the Conqueror in their ranks.<sup>134</sup> For Rhys, the existence of giants is indisputable: they are a manifestation of an infinitely wondrous natural world rather than an aberration.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Pen. 118, f. 734.

<sup>134</sup> Grooms, 274. The belief that figures such as William the Conqueror and King Arthur were taller than other men is not original to Rhys. In this section of his history, he is translating a defense of giants found in William Harrison’s 1577 *Historical Description of the Island of Britain*, which Rhys most likely would have encountered as the introduction to the first edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. Although Rhys draws upon English material for examples, however, a belief in the physical greatness of legendary and historical figures permeates Rhys’s original compositions and informs his general historical philosophy.

<sup>135</sup> Throughout his treatise, Rhys supplements his Welsh evidence with classical and medieval authorities, and it is unsurprising that he refers to the works of St. Augustine on several occasions. Although Rhys’s view on giants is particularly Welsh, his view on the nature of wonder is deeply influenced by Augustinian doctrine, which emphasizes the naturalness of wonders. According to Augustine, the diversity of nature was a testimony of the extent of God’s glory. This view can be seen throughout Rhys’s treatise: for the Welshmen, giants and other wonders are a fundamental and inarguable part of nature and thus cannot be

Rhys relies upon the giants' connection to natural *mirabilia* in order to explain the ways they have shaped the Welsh landscape. He describes the various topographical formations that he believes have been deliberately fashioned by giants, providing folkloric onomastic tales as evidence. He discusses the giants' affinity for mountainous environments and suggests that many of the world's mountain ranges have functioned as giants' dwelling places. This love of rocky and harsh terrain has made Wales a particular suitable home for their race. He claims:

*y bvant y rhan bhwyabh o'r cewri o hynny hyd hedhiw yn gnotav cymhennv ev presywlbha ar y brynnev a'r mynydhev vchabh...dewis mannoedh vchel i breswylaw yndvnt, oedh gan gewri Cymry wyntev o dechrevad cyntabh hwy hyd ar amser brenhin Arthur. Ac enwev llawer o honvnt, a'e trighbaev ac amseroedh ev gwledychiad a'e teyrnassiad, a'e gweithredoedh cobhiadwyabh, a'e bvchedhev, a'e haghev wy a wydhis hyd y dydh hedhiw; peth drwy gobh yscribhennedic, a pheth drwy gobh diyscribhen*

the majority of the giants from then [i.e. the time of Nimrod] until today were in the habit of settling on the highest hills and mountains...The Welsh giants chose to live in the highest places from the very beginning until the time of King Arthur. And the names of many of them, and their dwellings, and the times of their reign and rule, and their most remembered deeds, and their lives, and their deaths are known even until today, some things through written memory and some through unwritten memory.<sup>136</sup>

If Wales owes its legendary history to the giants Albion, Gomer, and Arthur, Rhys suggests that it owes its marvelous landscape to the myriad giants whose memories live on only in the names of strongholds, valleys, and villages throughout the land. Rhys provides over seventy brief onomastic tales connected with the giants of Britain, some of whom Rhys suggests still inhabit the space.<sup>137</sup> Some of these, such as Rhita Gawr and Idris Gawr, are well known from

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intrinsically wicked. For more on the Augustinian definition of wonder, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," 7-14.

<sup>136</sup> Grooms, 252-54.

<sup>137</sup> Pen. 118, ff. 829-837. Rhys's list of the native giants of Wales is by far the best-known section of the manuscript and serves as the basis for the editions of Owen, Parry-Williams, and Grooms. Due to its folkloric value, it is often isolated from its manuscript context and presented as an independent text. Only Grooms features it as part of a larger argument concerning the veracity of Galfridian history, although he chose to include only a portion of Rhys's writings about the giants in his edition.

Arthurian legend and modern Welsh folklore.<sup>138</sup> Most of the giants Rhys mentions are more obscure. Regardless of their fame or notoriety, Rhys narrates the life of each giant, imbuing it with a broad range of human emotions and experience. Some giants such as Rhita Gawr, Cribwr Gawr, and Cedwyn Gawr, Rhys claims, were violent beings who were among the foes of Brutus and Arthur. Others, however, are deeply humanized in his account. Many of these giants are depicted as simple farmers who tend livestock and their lands. Rhys incorporates small details that hint at the giants' peaceful domestic lives. For example, Drewyn Gawr, the namesake of Caer Drewyn near Bala, is remembered for the love he felt for his sweetheart. In a touching account, Rhys notes that *yw gariad y gwnaeth y Gaer honno, er godro ei gwarthec yndi* ("he made this stronghold for his love so that her cattle might graze within it").<sup>139</sup> Others are known not for their monstrous deeds, but for their high moral standards, such as Cynwil Gawr, whom Rhys goes so far as to describe as *gwr duwyawl* ("a godly man").<sup>140</sup>

Even when Rhys describes giants who opposed the heroic figures of Welsh legendary history, he depicts their struggles and their deaths sympathetically. He describes the giants' mourning rituals and compares them to human grief. For example, he tells the story of the death of Maylor Gawr at the hand of the Britons and his sons' futile attempts to save him. When one his sons, Cornippin, hears the sounding of the horn that signifies his father's death, Rhys claims *ebh a drisstaawdh yn dhirbhawr, ac yn bhwy no meint yr hiraethodh am ei dad; a'r lle hwnnw hyd hedhiw a elwir Cebhn Hiraethoc* ("he was deeply saddened, and he longed beyond measure for his father; and this place until today is called Cefn Hiraethog [the Ridge of Longing])."<sup>141</sup> Rather

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<sup>138</sup> In his collection of Welsh folklore, *Cymru Fu*, Isaac Foulkes collected tales concerning both Idris Gawr and Rhita Gawr. See Foulkes, *Cymru Fu* (Wrexham: Hughes and Sons, 1862). For more recent folkloric accounts of these giants, see Grooms, *The Giants of Wales*; T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979); and Jacqueline Simpson, "The Landscape" in *The Folklore of the Welsh Border* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), 17-30, esp. 18-21.

<sup>139</sup> Grooms, 314.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 306.



than lauding the British heroes, Rhys images the sorrow of the giants.<sup>142</sup> These giants stand in stark contrast to the fierce giants of English (and even many Welsh) insular histories. In response to English historiographical claims that giants were the product of the fevered imaginations of patriotic liars, Rhys not only defends these creatures' existence, but also claims that they formed a society parallel to that of their human counterparts. The giants, although monstrous in appearance, are social beings who have played a fundamental role in the political and, most importantly for Rhys, the natural history of Britain.

Rhys argues that the greatest mark the giants made on the Welsh landscape and the most indisputable proof of their existence is the archaeological evidence they left behind. He presents an extensive catalogue of the eponymous giants who literally forged the topographical features of the land. Drawing from the generic tropes of medieval *mirabilia* lists, he describes how the formation of Idris Gawr's stronghold of Cadair Idris near Dolgellau led to the creation of three natural wonders that can still be witnessed within the landscape today.<sup>143</sup> First is a large mountain lake whose underground caves act as a portal to transport an object from one side of the mountain to the other. Next is the large, flat stone formation that served as Idris's bed during his life and now turns those who dare to sleep upon it into either poets or madmen. Finally, Rhys tells of one of Idris's rivers that magically creates a great storm when water is taken from it to power the mills of Dolgellau. Although Rhys pays the most attention to the *mirabilia* associated with Idris Gawr, almost every giant in his account has left behind some sort of geographical wonder in the landscape of Wales. If Rhys is to be believed, every notable topographical feature of Wales is strewn with giants' graves, beds, and fossilized bones. He describes a valley in Penllyn in Snowdonia that served as the grave for Rhita Gawr; the ruins of the Roman fort at Aberystwyth

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<sup>142</sup> This sympathy for giants characterizes all of Rhys's history: for example, in his account of the struggles of the Patagonian giants against Ferdinand Magellan and his crew, Rhys firmly and unambiguously advocates for the rights of the Patagonians over the interests of their Spanish captors. For further discussion on the empathy Rhys expresses towards giants, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

<sup>143</sup> Grooms, 298.

that he attributes as the castle of Maylor Gawr; and a river in Shropshire where the ossified heads of giants can be found in the place of stones.<sup>144</sup> Although many of the giants Rhys mentions died during the time of the ancient Britons, their influence can still be felt: whereas other historians lamented the destruction of manuscripts that verified the existence of giants, Rhys suggests that the landscape itself contains such proof in the form of the giants' physical relics.

Although Rhys displays an interest in all types of natural *mirabilia*, he primarily concerns himself with the bodily remains of giants that he believes can be found in every land throughout the world. He argues that such fossils can be found, for instance, in most caves, and he lists examples of such in Wales. Besides the aforementioned underwater caves of Idris Gawr, Rhys also notes that giants such as Yscydion Gawr, Ophram Gawr, and Gerddan Gawr forged strongholds in the recesses in the Welsh mountains.<sup>145</sup> These caves correspond with Rhys's earlier accounts of people in Italy stumbling across the remains of giant corpses. He relates stories of giant teeth and bones found in Alpine caves that both reinforce the universal existence of giants as well as confirm the specific details of the living arrangements of the giants of Wales.<sup>146</sup> This link between the Welsh giants and the Italian giants is made explicit; of the Italian giant Pallus, Rhys claims: *A'r Pallas hwnn ydoedh gybheilht i Eneas y Troian, a'n hyneibh ni y Cymry* ("And this Pallus was a companion to Aeneas the Trojan and the ancestor of us, the Welsh").<sup>147</sup> Pallus is remembered for more than his acquaintanceship with Aeneas, however: Rhys suggests that Pallus's bones occasionally burst through the ground of his cavernous dwelling, reminding

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 300, 308, and 316, respectively.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 298, 300, and 312.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 264-72.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 270. Although this section of Rhys's history is a translation of Harrison's *Historical Description of the Island of Britain*, Rhys adds subtle details that elucidate his understanding of the relationship between the Welsh and the legendary figures of ancient Rome. Compare this to the corresponding passage in Harrison, which does not mention the relationship between the British and the Trojans: "this *Pallas* was companion with *Aeneas*."

Italians of their own giant history. Rhys's imagery of the cave-dwelling giants recalls the apocalyptic Galfridian narrative that found countless second lives in poetry and folklore. According to this tradition, the British giants had been imprisoned in the caves of Wales; at some unforeseen moment in the future, they will break free from their shackles and seek revenge.<sup>148</sup> By alluding to this medieval narrative, Rhys claims that the history of the giants is intrinsically bound to the history and future of Britain and its people. Unlike Drayton or Speed, who suggest that giants remain symbolic fossils of an imagined past, Rhys suggests that the bones of giants are constantly rupturing the contemporaneous landscape of Europe, refusing to be silenced.<sup>149</sup> He notes that the fossils of giants will often spring forth from the ground during earthquakes and other geological events that propel the hidden artifacts of forgotten histories into the public eye.<sup>150</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For Siôn Dafydd Rhys, the Welsh landscape is continually on the verge of erupting forth with giants who exist both inside and outside of historical time. Unlike his contemporaries who would relegate giants to the annals of history, he does not consider them to be an extinct, fossilized reminder of a heroic past: although giants were rarely to be seen in sixteenth-century Wales, Rhys is quick to note that the ancestors of Welsh giants continue to live in communities throughout Mexico, Patagonia, and Brazil, a phenomenon that I discuss in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Rhys's insistence not only on the historical reality of Welsh giants but also their

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<sup>148</sup> This image remained potent in the rhetoric of Welsh nationalism through the modern era, although the giants were often transformed into the metaphorical giants of Arthur, Owain Lawgoch, and Owain Glyndŵr, all of whom were considered *meibion darogan*, sons of prophecy, said to be sleeping in caves until the day the Welsh regain political control over the island. As early as William Baldwin's 1559 *Mirror for Magistrates*, the image of Welsh historical figures hiding in caves found an English audience. Baldwin presents Owain Glyndŵr as a ghostly figure who comes out of his cavernous hiding place to warn others who would challenge the authority of the English crown. However, where the Welsh vision of Glyndŵr's return was either triumphant or humorous, depending on the teller, Baldwin painted a stark vision of the leader who, he claims, "[came] out of the wilde mountaynes like the Image of death in all poyntes (his dart onely excepted) so sore hath famine and hunger consumed hym, may lament his folly after thys maner" (26). See Elissa Henken, "Three Forms of a Hero: Arthur, Owain Lawgoch, and Owain Glyndwr," *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 15 (1995): 22-31.

<sup>149</sup> For more on the antiquarian interest in fossils, see Woolf, 177-80.

<sup>150</sup> Grooms, 284.

continued existence on the edges of the *oikumene* speaks to his deep desire to promote the marvelous narratives of medieval and folkloric Welsh history in the face of the very real threats they encountered throughout the course of his lifetime.

Although Rhys's work stands out for its singular imagination and unquestioning support of a particularly medieval worldview, his work echoes many other sixteenth-century reimaginings of medieval Welsh history. For the Welsh humanist historians, Welsh identity can be partially located in the existence of giants and other marvels. Some, such as Elis Gruffydd and John Prise, only suggest the possibility of aboriginal giants, while others such as the chronicler of Peniarth MS 163ii and Rhys wholeheartedly embrace the historicity of the Albina legend and other tales of giants drawn from medieval literature and folklore. Regardless of the strength of their defenses, almost all Welsh commentators on early British history persisted in justifying this particular aspect of traditional Welsh history long after their English counterparts rejected it for new Anglocentric visions of British history that threatened to entirely subsume Welsh identity or deny it outright. By defending such fantastical narratives, these scholars defended the symbols of a Welsh geographic and cultural exceptionalism that positioned medieval Welsh culture as extraordinarily vital. This vitality argued for the continued relevance of the Welsh in the modern English political landscape. The Tudor unification project had proposed a Britain united not just by shared legal structure, but also a shared history and Anglo-British identity that would replace insular minority ethnicities. Confronted with the threat of assimilation, Welsh antiquarians, humanists, and poets turned to medieval narratives that highlighted the fundamental geographic and cultural differences between Wales and its neighbors. After the publication of Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, this tendency manifested itself in the defense of the giants of Welsh pseudohistory. This defense of giants was not the only instance of self-exoticization in the literature of sixteenth-century Wales. In the next chapter, I will show how Welsh authors combined the figure of the giant with the figure of the prehistoric noble savage popular in early

modern European political rhetoric in order to defend the antiquity of the Welsh people and language.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE RELICS OF BRITISH WONDER IN THE TUDOR LANDSCAPE

Welsh authors of the sixteenth century fervently campaigned for ownership of their own national past and for control over the British historical record. Following the lead of their medieval predecessors, they often turned to marvelous narratives rooted in pseudohistory in order to exoticize the Welsh people and landscape, an act that in turn fortified their claims to a culturally and politically autonomous Wales. While this defamiliarization of Welsh identity often took the form of stories concerning the native giants of Britain, other popular historical narratives were equally upheld as evidence of Welsh exceptionalism. In *The Breviary of Britain*, for example, Humphrey Llwyd positions the ancient Britons as almost prehistoric beings compared to civilized Romans and explains the success of the latter's invasion of the island in terms of the British warrior's unsuitability for modern warfare. He quotes a Latin panegyric attributed to Claudius Mamertinus that celebrates the Roman conquest of Britain:

Besides, this nation was then but rude, and the Britons being accustomed but only to the Redshanks and Irishmen their enemies, as yet but half naked, soon yielded to the Roman arms and ensigns.<sup>1</sup>

This depiction of the Britons is a far cry from the noble Trojan Brutus or the majestic King Arthur of Welsh legend. Rather, these half-naked warriors bring to mind images of the aboriginal giants of Albion or the cave dwellers of Siôn Dafydd Rhys's treatise discussed in the previous chapter. And yet Llwyd evokes these rustic forefathers repeatedly in his defense of Welsh nationhood and identity. Throughout the *Breviary*, he describes the ancient Welsh as a blue-painted primitive people whose legacy endures in the rugged character of their modern descendants. Although Llwyd's imagery borrows heavily from racialized Roman depictions of the early Britons as well as contemporary English discourse on the nature of savagery, he presents the Britons in a wholly positive manner. For Llwyd, these figures do not represent the barbarism of his fellow

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<sup>1</sup> Schwyzer, *The Breviary of Britain*, 92. Schwyzer suggests that although Llwyd attributes the panegyric to Claudius Mamertinus, it is unlikely that he composed the piece, as the events it describes occurred almost a century before Mamertinus's lifetime.

countrymen; instead, they demonstrate the antiquity of the Welsh nation and bolster its claims to British aboriginal status. If the Welsh descended from savages, they were Noble Savages whose lack of outward civilization spoke to an intrinsic spiritual and historical purity absent among their English neighbors.

The similarities between the giants of Welsh legend and the wild men of Welsh prehistory in sixteenth-century historico-political rhetoric are not coincidental: both derive from the same medieval narratives surrounding *mirabilia* and Welsh exceptionalism that found renewed popularity among Tudor historians. Both are products of the same antiquarian impulse born from the diminished status of Welsh language and culture following the Acts of Union. In an era of decreased linguistic and political autonomy, Welshmen looked to the marvels within their own borders—their landscape, their language, and their ancestry—as a defense against calls for absorption into an English whole. During this period, the nature of British identity was rapidly changing from one rooted in Welsh pseudohistory to an Anglocentric model; in response to these overwhelming societal changes, stories concerning giants and wild men sought to affirm the Welsh as aboriginal Britons. Unlike tales of ancient giants, however, the image of the British Noble Savage was often applied not just to the ancestors of the Welsh, but also to contemporaneous Welshmen whose unrefined mountain villages and seemingly ancient tongue were portrayed as direct links to the long distant past. Educated Welsh historians exoticized their homeland and its inhabitants as living relics of a pre-Saxon age whose mere existence called into question the very foundation of Tudor unification efforts.

This sort of treatment of rural or otherwise geographically marginal people is not unique to the early modern Welsh *literati*: from the barbarians of Greek ethnography to the green men of medieval romance, rusticity could be fetishized both positively and negatively as a function of marvelous or dangerous landscapes.<sup>2</sup> Although this trope could be applied to any liminal ethnic or

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of this phenomenon, see Hayden White, “Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea” in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, Eds. Edward

social group, it often found its purest expression in descriptions of populations closely bordering hegemonic centers, those intimate foreigners whose differences highlighted the thin line between civilization and nature.<sup>3</sup> Gaile McGregor has termed this phenomenon “chronological primitivism,” that is, the perception that non-urban populations retained closer ties to the primitive humans of prehistory than to their own contemporaneous neighbors.<sup>4</sup> Chronological primitivism often overlaps with geographical primitivism, by which cultural difference is viewed through the prism of landscape *mirabilia*.<sup>5</sup> Both modes of primitivism have been applied to Wales in English literature since the Middle Ages. As I have shown in the first chapter of this dissertation, English authors conceptualized Wales in these terms dating back to the Anglo-Norman period: the terrors of the mountainous Welsh terrain found expression in such creatures as the Green Knight from *Sir Gawain* and the primordial demonic castle denizens of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. These figures speak not only the strange wonders of the foreign landscape, but also the primitive and wild nature of those who dwell within it.

By the sixteenth century, the figure of the Noble Savage could be found throughout much of Western European literature, appearing in such forms as the Native American and the Celtic

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Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 3-38; and Robert A. Williams, Jr., *Savage Anxieties: The Invention of Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 159-78.

<sup>3</sup> Ter Ellingson notes that within Europe, this trope has been applied to “the Moors and Basques, the Mediterranean island peoples, the Irish, the Slavs, and the Saami, or ‘Lapps’ of northern Scandinavia” (129). I would add the Welsh to this list. Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 128-39. See also White, *ibid.*, 21; and Gaile McGregor, *The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Towards a Syntactics of Place* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 34-45.

<sup>4</sup> McGregor, 12. See also Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 71-104.

<sup>5</sup> Chronological and geographical primitivism resemble each other in other ways. Daniel Woolf has argued that antiquarian fetishism “exoticizes oldness” in such a way that objects and people perceived as ancient function as *mirabilia* in the same way as landscape marvels or curiosities from geographically distant lands. Woolf, 141.



Wild Man.<sup>6</sup> As the figure became more prominent in a wide variety of literary genres, it developed greater complexity and elasticity, adapting to disparate political and aesthetic needs. Although the earliest examples of the trope portray the savage as barbaric, often descended from the biblical monsters Cain and Ham, the figure could also represent a prelapsarian state of grace. As early as the fourteenth century, the Noble Savage began to appear in *contemptus mundi* literature as a stock character whose simple lifestyle contrasts with the immorality of European excess.<sup>7</sup> The Brahmins of the Alexander Romance and Montaigne's cannibals both fall into this category.<sup>8</sup> In early modern English literature, however, the Savage frequently appears as a monster in the wilderness rather than the caretaker of an Edenic garden.<sup>9</sup> While this characterization features in English depictions of the Americas more often than in accounts of

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<sup>6</sup> McGregor, 18-22. Much attention has been paid to the role the Irish played in the development of the Noble Savage trope in England. As early as the twelfth century, Gerald of Wales presented the Irish as barbarians in his *Topographia Hibernica*, and Katherine Simms has shown that by the late Middle Ages, Irish lords cultivated aspects of this image themselves in order to establish their kinship with the Irish kings of the mythical past. Following the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the seventeenth century, the figure of the Irish savage found new and long-lasting political resonance that continued until the twentieth century. For example, an illustration in the May 20, 1882 issue of *Punch* depicts a giant, malformed monster as "The Irish Frankenstein," while a similarly themed illustration from 1869 presents Irish Nationalists as the "Celtic Caliban." Although such treatment of the Welsh was generally less aggressive, the well-documented primitivization of the Irish in English political and literary discourse provides a salient counterpoint for the study of Welsh identity during the early modern period. See Katherine Simms, "The Barefoot Kings: Literary Image and Reality in Late Medieval Ireland," *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 30 (2011): 1-21; Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 52-63; Ronald Takaki, "The Tempest in the Wilderness: A Tale of Two Frontiers" in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, Rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2008), 21-50; Peter Burke, "Frontiers of the Monstrous: Perceiving National Characters in Early Modern Europe" in *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe*, Eds. Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 38-39; and Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28-30.

<sup>7</sup> White, 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Michel de Montaigne, "On the Cannibals" in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, Ed. and trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2004), 228-41. For more on the Alexander Romance and its tradition in Wales, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 77-86.

early British history, it has deep ramifications for the perception of the Welsh in English literature.

In contrast, Welsh authors routinely portrayed the Noble Savage as a historical marvel, at times even empathizing with such characters. For example, despite the prevalence of the figure of the Noble Savage in medieval and early modern literature, Humphrey Llwyd employs the trope in a subversive and uniquely Welsh fashion. What is distinctive about Llwyd's account of the early Britons is not his use of a fairly common literary convention but rather his application of said convention to his own ethnic group. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Welsh characters often appeared in English texts as rustic and violent buffoons unsuitable for urban, modern life;<sup>10</sup> Llwyd's text avails itself of this imagery, yet he praises these traits as virtues. Rather than dismissing the provincial nature of the Welsh, he frames their lack of sophistication in terms of historical purity, offering it as further proof of the indigenous status of the ancient Britons and their descendants. Llwyd was not alone among his contemporaries: Gruffudd Hiraethog, George Owen, John Davies, and many others primitivized the Welsh language and landscape as aboriginal while simultaneously extolling their worth in a post-unification context. The nativist tendencies of late sixteenth-century Welsh scholars closely mirrored the orientalist discourse of their medieval predecessors who drew parallels between the Indian landscapes of travel literature and the Welsh courts of native romance. Whereas medieval texts such as *Breuddwyd Maxen* and *Peredur* explore the geographical distance between Wales and the Far East, however, later antiquarians often fetishized the chronological distance between prehistory and their own time. Their histories and grammars present the Welsh as British Indians whose tongue derived from the Hebrew spoken at Babel.

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of Welsh stereotypes in early modern English literature, see Gillian E. Brennan, "The Cheese and the Welsh: Foreigners in Elizabethan Literature," *Renaissance Studies* 8.1 (1994): 40-64; and J.O. Bartley and Melville Richards, "The Welsh Language in English Plays," *The Welsh Review* 6.1 (1947): 39-50. See also Sarah Anne Brown, *Welsh Characters in Renaissance Drama* (Ph.D. thesis, Texas Tech University, 2000).

The differences in English and Welsh depictions of the Britons can be traced to classical notions of environmentalism that rooted national and ethnic traits in geographical features.<sup>11</sup> In early modern political and literary discourse, the figure of the Savage was associated with one of two distinct landscapes—the wilderness and the garden—and his virtue depended heavily on the nature of the landscape in which he could be found.<sup>12</sup> For the English, the mountains of Wales represented a foreboding wildness that shaped the culture of its inhabitants. The untamed landscape was reflected in the rustic customs of the Welsh and the language they spoke, both of which were often exoticized or ridiculed in sixteenth-century English literature.<sup>13</sup> The Welsh, on the other hand, envisioned their homeland as a marvelous, Edenic space and consequently themselves as Adamic figures whose rusticity spoke to their historical purity. In this chapter, I will consider the trope of Welsh as Noble Savage in both English and Welsh literature and analyze the ways in which these two literatures speak to competing visions of the British past. In particular, I will explore how both English and Welsh texts configure Welsh landscape and language, and thus Welsh people, as historical *mirabilia* irrevocably bound to the world of the ancient Britons. In doing so, I will argue that the figure of the Welsh Noble Savage belongs to the long-standing tradition of self-exoticization used to establish Welsh linguistic and cultural exceptionalism.

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<sup>11</sup> McGregor, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 34-45.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Berkhofer has argued that the portrayal of the Noble Savage as inhabiting Edenic gardens as opposed to the threatening wilderness was a uniquely French perspective during the sixteenth century. He suggests that similar English treatment of the figure during this period is directly borrowed from French sources. Given the empathy many contemporaneous Welsh texts express towards indigenous peoples (notably the early Britons and various Native American tribes), I would challenge Berkhofer's claim that positive depictions of savagery were uniquely French phenomena. Despite this criticism, however, his research regarding English contempt for uncultivated landscapes remains incredibly valuable for understanding Anglo-Welsh relations during this period. Berkhofer, 74-77.

### **“BARELEGGED AND UNSHOD”: THE WELSH AS BRITISH NOBLE SAVAGE**

Racialized and exoticized depictions of the Welsh have a long history in the corpus of English literature. Among the English *literati* of the medieval and early modern periods, Wales was a source of great natural wonders whose physical, and often imposing, beauty contrasted deeply with the baseness of its poor and rural inhabitants. This contrast informs medieval romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Fouke le Fitzwaryn*, whose eponymous heroes must navigate the marvelous terrain of the Welsh mountains and the monstrous giants who reside within them.<sup>14</sup> The idea that a race of mountain-dwelling giants of Eastern origin were the original ancestors to the modern Welsh gained ground in the sixteenth century among English and Welsh antiquarians and historians: the latter sought aboriginal ancestry for the Welsh, while the former employed such tales to create a mythical origin story for a newly unified Britain. For many of these authors, the figure of the barbaric Welshman was not confined to the annals of insular history, but survived into their own time, living among the crags and valleys of the Welsh landscape. Just as the rhetoric surrounding the medieval giants had diverged along national lines, so too did sixteenth-century English and Welsh literature differ in their appraisal of the Welsh mountaineer. While Welsh authors emphasized the rustic nobility of these figures, English authors tended either to highlight the menace implicit in their savagery or lampoon them as boorish clowns. Both of these approaches exerted English hegemony while delegitimizing the Welsh and marginalizing their claims to political and cultural autonomy.

Even Marcher authors generally sympathetic to the Welsh often viewed their western neighbors as living relics of a different era. Although some of these authors self-identified as Welsh and ostensibly promoted Welsh historical claims, they fetishized the rurality of Wales, positioning landscape difference as indicative of moral difference. For example, Thomas Churchyard's *The Worthines of Wales*, a prosimetrical account of the author's journey from South Wales through the Marches into Gwynedd, highlights the various wonders he witnessed

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter One of this dissertation.

throughout his travels, citing them as evidence of the value of the land and its people. Although Churchyard claims to have observed many of these marvels himself (and offers cautious disclaimers about those he has not), his list of wonders draws heavily from the medieval tradition of Welsh *mirabilia*, including such standard geographic wonders as the plentiful salmon available year-round in the Wye, curious streams that course backwards, and marvelous wells. Above all, Churchyard is entranced by the mountain ranges in both the north and south of the country, which he describes as “monstrous to the eye,” offering “strange wonders” for those who scale their peaks.<sup>15</sup> Despite their monstrous aspects, however, Churchyard considers the mountains’ stark beauty one of Wales’s greatest assets. He compares them to kings who rule over their subjects simultaneously invoking fear and awe:

You may compare, a King to Mountayne hye,  
Whose princely power, can byde both bront and shocke  
Of bitter blast, or Thunderbolt from Skye,  
His Fortresse stands, vpon so firme a Rocke.  
A Prince helps all, and doth so strongly sit,  
That noe can harme, by fraude, by force nor wit.  
The weake must leane, where strength doth most remayne,  
The Mountayne great, commaunds the little Playne.  
As Mountayne is, a noble stately thing.

For Churchyard, the mountains are emblematic of all of Wales: rugged, frightful, and yet somehow drawing its majesty from these qualities.

This wondrous geography not only exerts its power over visitors, but also shapes the character of its natives and ennobles them. Churchyard suggests that the simple lifestyle of the peasants of the Welsh highlands is superior to that of more urbanized England. Whereas the English live their lives in unremarkable cities and towns, the Welsh thrive among the wonders of nature; he claims, “these ragged Rocks brings plainest people forth.” Churchyard, a native of Shrewsbury, had many personal and political reasons for the promotion of Wales, and it is clear

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *The Worthines of Wales* (London, 1587).

that on some level he considers himself a Welshman.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, he identifies Shrewsbury as a Welsh space:

Can Wales be nam'de, and Shropshire be forgote,  
The marshes must make muster with the rest...  
Wales once it was and yet to mend thy tale.  
Make Wales the Parke, and plaine Shropshire the pale.  
If pale be not, a speciall peece of Parke.

Although Churchyard manipulates the geographic barriers of Wales to include the March, he views Wales as a fundamentally distinct entity from its more powerful neighbor. He begins the poem with a list of nations, condemning the French for their faithlessness, the Danes and Germans for their drunkenness, and the Scottish for their bloodlust. He laments that even England “hath learnde such lewdnesse late.” Among all the nations of Western Europe, Wales “is now the soundest state,” having abandoned its rebellious tendencies after the devastation of the Glyndŵr uprisings and joining with England to recreate the historic British state.

Regardless of the affinities he feels towards the Welsh, however, Churchyard does not hesitate to present them as a primitive people, despite his initial claims that they are neither rude nor barbarous. He remarks upon their laziness, paradoxically criticizing them for their inability to properly cultivate the wilderness that he professes to admire. He describes them as “barelegge and unshod” and consistently equates them to the beasts of burden who till the fields. If the Welsh are savages, however, they are in the mold of the Noble Savage whose primitive society presents

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<sup>16</sup> In Churchyard’s dedication to Elizabeth I, he reminds the queen of her own Welsh heritage and states that he composed a poem about Wales and its plain, but moral people to honor her ancestry. By linking both himself and the Tudors to the Welsh peasant, he makes a public political statement regarding the centrality the figure of the aboriginal Welshman played during contemporary debates regarding the narrative of British history. At the same time, he establishes a private personal connection with the ruling Tudor elite. Philip Schwyzer has termed the works of Churchyard, John Dee, Arthur Kelton, and other English authors of the sixteenth century who emphasized and capitalized on their (real or perceived) Welsh heritage as “cultural ventriloquism” that led to the erasure of authentic Welsh voices in the English public sphere. While I would agree that these authors overemphasize their claims to Welshness, often for overtly political reasons, these claims are neither disingenuous nor false: Dee was a first generation London-Welshman, while Kelton and Churchyard hailed from Shrewsbury, a Marcher town with a substantial Welsh population through the seventeenth century. See Schwyzer, “Thirteen Ways of Looking Like a Welshman: Shakespeare and his Contemporaries” in *Shakespeare and Wales*, 23-32; and Geraint H. Jenkins, Richard Suggett, and Eryn M. White, “The Welsh Language in Early Modern Wales” in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, 75.

an idyllic counterpart to the dominant culture.<sup>17</sup> Churchyard's Welshmen are only made stronger, happier, and more righteous by their isolation from the larger world:

The Mountayne men liue longer many a yeere  
Then those in Uale, in playne or marrish soyle:  
A lustie hart, a cleane complexion cleere  
They haue on Hill, that for hard liuing toyle.

Although they live meagerly and primitively, they are content to eat oatcakes, sing folksongs, and dwell among the mountain creatures. Churchyard concludes that "Poore Mountayne folke, possesse not such great store,/ But when its gon, they care not much therefore."

While Churchyard romanticizes the rural Welsh as relics of a simpler age, other English authors are less laudatory and instead rely heavily on the figure of the Noble Savage popular in contemporary travel narratives in their depictions of Wales. In the eyes of some poets and playwrights, contemporary Welshmen appeared more akin to the ancient Britons than to their immediate English neighbors; several of these authors, such as Robert Armin and William Shakespeare, exploited these perceived connections in their historical plays, employing Welsh characters as an intermediary between their modern London audiences and the ancient subject matter of their works. In these plays, Wales becomes a physically and temporally foreign space. For example, Armin's *Caradog, or The Valiant Welshman*, presents Britain and Wales as separate countries with different monarchies: Octavian oversees the kingdom of North Wales, while Gederus is the crowned king of Britain who rules from London.<sup>18</sup> In the text, Britain and Wales

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<sup>17</sup> Although the term 'Noble Savage' was not in use in English until the seventeenth century, the concept of the Noble Savage has roots dating back to classical ethnography as well as the medieval figures like the Brahmins and Amazons found in Eastern geographical lore. The concept more broadly entered Western literary and popular culture during the sixteenth century: many travelers to the Americas, such as Michel de Montaigne and Thomas Harriot, presented the newly discovered lands as paradises whose primitive, but righteous people could provide a counterexample to the excesses of Western society. See John Block Friedman, "Monstrous Men as Noble Savages" in *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 163-77; and Ellingson, "The Birth of the Noble Savage" in *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, 11-44.

<sup>18</sup> This political division of the island has some parallels in medieval Welsh texts, in particular *Branwen uerch Llyr* and *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic*. In the former, Bendigeidfran is the crowned king over all of the Island of Britain, yet he governs from Harlech in North Wales. By the end of the Second Branch, his brother Caswallawn has become king in London, disenfranchising many of the Welshmen associated with Bendigeidfran's Harlech-based rule. Similarly, in *Breudwyt Maxen*, Elen and Maxen rule from Caernarfon after deposing Caswallawn in London. Despite these similarities, however, it is extremely unlikely that

are not only politically divided, but they are also presented as culturally and topographically distinct from one another. Whereas Roman soldiers occupy the former, the latter teems with witches and magic serpents.<sup>19</sup> Armin fashions Britain as the site of historical progress in which empires are born; Wales, on the other hand, is an almost ahistorical space in which monsters from medieval romance battle primitive warriors drawn from accounts of pre-Roman British history.

The narrative begins as Fortuna awakens an ancient Welsh bard in his grave and summons him to recite the story of the Welsh prince Caradog who fought off the Romans and ensured British sovereignty. The Bard speaks of Welsh valor and courage, and Caradog himself is characterized as a universal figure of British heroism. However, it is notable that throughout the work, all military action and diplomacy occur in a nebulous Britain, whose borders are not clearly delineated, but plainly do not include Wales.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, the Wales of the play resembles a sort of fairyland: the primary plot that unfolds there involves a cave-dwelling witch who can conjure monsters with her art and the destruction these beasts wreak on the Welsh wilderness. The climax of the play sees Caradog navigating opposing threats on either side of the geographic divide: the Romans attempt to invade via Britain, while a giant serpent attacks Wales. Once Caradog leaves to fight in Britain, the audience's primary guide in the Welsh scenes is the prince's close friend Morgan, a stereotypical stage Welshman whose exaggerated pseudo-Welsh accent and preposterous behavior mark him as a racialized vision of the modern Welshman.<sup>21</sup> The play

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Armin would have been familiar with these tales. The division between Wales and Britain in his work more likely speaks to the increased marginalization of cambricized Wales that occurred throughout the sixteenth century.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Armin, *Caradog, or the Valiant Welshman* (London, 1610).

<sup>20</sup> Marisa Cull has argued that in both *The Valiant Welshman* and *Cymbeline*, the physical space of Wales represents the mythological realm that must be absorbed into a more logical Anglo-British historical narrative. She notes that both plays premiered in 1610, the year of the investiture of Henry Frederick, eldest son of James I, as Prince of Wales, and suggests that these plays reflect a distinctly Jacobean model of British unification. Cull, 127-42.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the trope of the Stage Welshman and his relationship to other representations of foreignness in late sixteenth-century England, see Brennan, 40-64.



seems unconcerned that this figure of the contemporary English stage appears alongside ancient Britons and Romans; rather, it suggests that Morgan's comical traits are historically Welsh, not unlike the giants and monsters that appear in the Welsh woods.

The relationship between a marvelous Wales and a historical Anglocentric Britain informs Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, which also premiered in 1610. The plot of *Cymbeline* echoes that of *The Valiant Welshman*: Roman threats to the British crown are resolved only once princes from an independent and mythic Wales are called to lead the British to victory. The relationship between the British and the Welsh is more complicated here than in Armin's work: the princes of *Cymbeline*, Guiderius and Arviragus, are not actually Welsh, but instead are revealed to be the long-lost sons of King Cymbeline of Britain who, in the end, must reject the rugged mountains of Wales for the refinements of the British court.<sup>22</sup> By doing so, Guiderius and Arviragus concede the sovereignty of Wales to the throne in London; it is only through the act of political unification that the rustic Welsh mountaineers can transform into civilized British nobility. Despite this confusion of identities, Shakespeare is careful to distinguish Wales as a space distinct from Britain, although *Cymbeline* ostensibly dramatizes an episode from early Welsh history. While the text acknowledges its debt to the Galfridian narrative in which Cambro-British kings battle Romans for dominion over the island, it retells this narrative only insofar as it provides precedent for the establishment of a unified Anglo-British state. In the play, Wales is simultaneously the birthplace of Britain and its most disparate part; it is the site of history yet somehow stands

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<sup>22</sup> As Lisa Hopkins has argued, *Cymbeline* relates two tales of *translatio imperii*. On the surface, Cymbeline's reconciliation with the Romans in the final act passes authority from Britain to Rome. On another level, however, the play dramatizes a very real shift away from Welsh mythical history that was happening in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and towards a new British origin story based more on classical models. New narratives were being created that replaced figures from Geoffrey with Neptune and Hercules, and the term British stopped referring solely to the ancestors of the Welsh. The trope of Wales as birthplace of kings was greatly diminished after seeing a surge in popularity in the early sixteenth century, and many English historians were growing more quick to disregard the Galfridian vision of the past. In *Cymbeline*, Welsh caves incubate British leaders, but only on the condition that the occupants were never really Welsh to begin with. See Hopkins, "Cymbeline, the *translatio imperii*, and the Matter of Britain" in *Shakespeare and Wales*, 143-56; and John E. Curran, "Royalty Unlearned, Honor Untaught: British Savages and Historiographical Change in *Cymbeline*," *Comparative Drama* (Summer 1997): 277-303.

outside of history itself. Its language, landscape, and customs mark it as a site of difference that prevents it from fully participating in larger insular culture.

This bifurcation of Wales and Britain speaks to the role of Wales in the English literary imagination as a place of intimate difference, a sort of fun-house mirror version of its more powerful neighbor. In many ways, it fulfills the role all pastoral settings must play—its stark contrast from the courtly setting allows for satire of the court. However, as Huw Griffiths has noted, in *Cymbeline* sinister dangers lay hidden within the Welsh landscape. He writes: “the wild landscape has its own part in the unifying project of the play. That wildness is also shown to be potentially dangerous...the pastoral here is not a tame agrarian pastoral but something much more disturbing...There are no shepherds here, only hunters and a setting of mountains and caves.”<sup>23</sup> The British princess Innogen’s perception of the world outside of London echoes the dual nature of Wales within the play. When she learns of her lover Posthumus’s location in Pembrokeshire, she imagines it as bucolic escape from the court. She plays on the name Milford Haven,<sup>24</sup> calling it “Blessed Milford” and wondering “how Wales was made so happy as/ T’inherit such a haven” (III.2.63-64).<sup>25</sup> Yet she also recognizes the strangeness of such a land and the dangers such strangeness can conceal. She likens all land outside of British control to Africa, explaining, “courtiers say all’s savage but at court” (IV.2.40).

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<sup>23</sup> Griffiths, “The Geographies of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 34.3 (2004): 347.

<sup>24</sup> Several scholars, such as Emrys Jones, Glenn Clark, Ronald Boling, and Terence Hawkes have noted the significance of Milford Haven to Tudor mythology: Henry VII had landed his ships there in 1485 at the beginning of his campaign against Richard III, and it remained an important commercial and military port through the early modern period. Although the town is treated as a Welsh space by much of the scholarship on *Cymbeline*, it is important to remember that for the Welsh, it was an English town that earned its nickname, “Little England beyond Wales.” The Pembrokeshire Welsh language community is often depicted as exiled within its own borders or forced to flee to the cymricized community of Carmarthenshire, a refuge for those wishing to preserve their Welsh identities. According to contemporaneous historian John Prise, “by reason of opposition from Strangers, and the disloyalty of their own people, and vexation and war thereupon, they were for the most part compelled to keepe themselves in Carmarthenshire” (*Description of Wales*). See Jones, “Stuart *Cymbeline*,” 84-99; Clark, 230-59; Boling, 33-66; and Hawkes, 46-65.

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

When Innogen arrives in Wales, her expectations are met: she finds rustic warriors, decapitated corpses, ghosts, fairies, and other wonders that mark Wales as fundamentally different from her home in Britain. In particular, she is taken aback by the primitive, almost prehistoric, Welshmen. Although the Welsh characters Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus are all former members of the British court, they have gone native, so to speak, leaving their courtly origins behind them in the case of Belarius or never having known that they existed in the first place in the case of the two princes. Belarius, as the father figure who remembers a more civilized life, warns the boys of the dangers to be found in court and reminds them of the simple virtues of their own lives as hunters in the Welsh mountains. Guiderius and Arviragus, on the other hand, reject their foster-father's advice and complain that they languish in their cave without a chance to experience the wider world. For example, in Act III, scene 3, Belarius's attempts to rouse the youths for another day foraging in the woods is met with Arviragus's protest that they are wasting their lives far from civilization in a cave that is slowly turning them into something less than human:

What should we speak of  
When we are old as you? when we shall hear  
The rain and wind beat dark December, how,  
In this our pinching cave, shall we discourse  
The freezing hours away? We have seen nothing;  
We are beastly, subtle as the fox for prey,  
Like warlike as the wolf for what we eat;  
Our valour is to chase what flies; our cage  
We make a quire, as doth the prison'd bird,  
And sing our bondage freely. (ll. 39-48)

In another scene, fearing retribution from the British army for his murder of the British prince Cloten, Guiderius echoes his brother's sentiments, noting that they cannot seek protection in the approaching Roman army because they would be considered monstrous aberrations. He claims: "the Romans/ Must or for Britons slay us, or receive us/ For barbarous and unnatural revolts" (IV.4.6-8). Belarius concurs and reminds them that they can only truly find refuge even deeper in the mountains. To some extent, Belarius is correct. Both the British and the Romans view the

cave-dwellers as a dangerous curiosity. This attitude informs Cloten's initial appraisal of Guiderius as a "villain mountaineer," a title Guiderius confirms by decapitating the prince in battle. Although Cloten's death is presented as justified within the play, Guiderius's violent response to his insult speaks to a level of lawlessness that defines life in Wales in the text.<sup>26</sup>

Despite their status as brutish outsiders, however, Belarius and his wards consistently display an inherent goodness that becomes clear to others once they meet them. When Innogen first encounters them, she is taken back by their appearance and their living conditions; yet only a brief time in their company leads her to see their essential nobility and kindness. She quickly dismisses the prejudices bred in her at court and declares them her own kin. Although Arviragus had worried that mountain living had transformed him and his brother into beasts, his concerns seem misplaced, as the mountains could not erase their virtue. They are certainly uncivilized, yet their instincts remain pure. Belarius remarks upon their incongruous nature, claiming:

They are as gentle  
As zephyrs blowing below the violet,  
Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,  
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rudest wind,  
That by the top doth take the mountain pine,  
And make him stoop to the vale. 'Tis wonder  
That an invisible instinct should frame them  
To royalty unlearn'd, honour untaught,  
Civility not seen from other, valour  
That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop  
As if it had been sow'd. (IV.2.220-230)

Guiderius and Arviragus, like their counterparts in *The Valiant Welshmen* and *The Worthines of Wales*, fulfill the role of the Noble Savage whose fierce appearance and brutish manners betray his inherent goodness.

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<sup>26</sup> This depiction of Wales as a place of remarkable violence informs the other Shakespearean work set there, *Henry IV, Part I*. While Owen Glendower openly betrays no level of barbarism, speaking eloquently and carefully manipulating diplomatic negotiations, the people over whom he rules exhibit a level of brutality incompatible with civilized English life. Consider the bands of Welsh women in the play said to have shamelessly desecrated the corpses of the English dead in Hereford. Furthermore, it is suggested that Glendower only hides behind a thin layer of cultivation and in truth is an "irregular and wild" force who gives orders for the ritual mutilation of enemy corpses. Although the Wales of *Cymbeline* is not quite that barbaric, the play insinuates that it exists beyond the pale of British legal and moral jurisdiction.

In his description of the princes, Shakespeare deliberately echoes the rhetoric of the countless ethnographies and travelogues of the Americas that flooded the London literary market throughout the sixteenth century. He was not alone among English authors who found parallels to the figure of the native British savage in the New World. Although representations of the Welsh as Noble Savages are not as fraught with religious chauvinism and colonial overtones as accounts from the Americas, they stem from similar impulses.<sup>27</sup> If the Native Americans represented a prelapsarian purity, the Welsh represented a prehistorical purity for some authors. For example, in his description of the people of Virginia, Thomas Harriot describes the native Algonquians in language that parallels both Belarius's praise for the Welsh princes and Churchyard's paean to the Welsh mountaineers. He states:

In respect of vs they are a people poore, and for want of skill and iudgement in the knowledge and vse of our things, doe esteeme our trifles before thinges of greater value. Notwithstanding in their proper manner considering the want of such meanes as he haue, they seeme very ingenious. For although they haue no such tooles, nor any such sciences and artes as wee; yet in those thinges they doe, they shewe excellencie of wit... Whereby may bee hoped if meanes of good gouernment bee vsed, that they may in short time be brought to ciuilitie and imbracing religion.<sup>28</sup>

He contrasts the Algonquians' poverty to their intelligence, suggesting that because of their virtuous nature they will willingly convert to Christianity, an action that he implies will lead the natives to further recognize British superiority and relinquish control of their own land, whose marvels he proceeds to enumerate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The similarities between representations of the American Indians and pre-Saxon Britons manifest themselves most clearly in the legend of Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd that circulated among English and Welsh historians in the late sixteenth century. According to the legend, the native populations of the Americas were said to be the ancestors of a medieval Welsh prince and his retinue who established a colony of Welshmen in the twelfth century. For more on this legend and its connections to trends in sixteenth-century British historiography, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (London, 1588), 25.

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of the competing loyalties informing Harriot's work, see Andrew Hadfield, "Bruited Abroad: John White and Thomas Harriot's Colonial Representations of Ancient Britain" in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, 162-74.

Harriot cites the precedent for such behavior in the earliest Britons who ceded their customs and their lands after exposure to Christianity. He describes them as “sauages” whose physical appearance was even more shocking and monstrous than that of the Americans. He describes the Britons’ blue skin, their hirsute bodies, and their grotesque tattoos:

They shaue all their berde except the mustaches, vppon breast wear painted the head of som birde, and about the pappes as yt waere beames of the sune, vppon the bellye sum feere full and monstreus face, spreedinge the beames fare vppon the thighs. Vppon the two knees som faces of lion, and vppon their leggs as yt hat been shelles of fish. Vppon their Shoulders griffones heades, and then they serpents abowt their armes.”<sup>30</sup>

Compared to the noble Algonquians who “are not to be feared,” the earliest Britons, he argues, were much more difficult to tame. As if to emphasize this point, Theodor de Bry’s illustrations of monstrous Britons holding severed heads are interspersed throughout Harriot’s text. These images of fierce tattooed Britons are juxtaposed with de Bry’s illustrations of the Algonquians, whose appearance, by contrast, conforms to European beauty standards. If, as Andrew Hadfield suggests, the text “encourage[s] the reader to think of the native Americans in terms of European society” and ultimately judge them favorably,<sup>31</sup> then references to the barbarity of the earliest Britons signaled to the audience the ease with which the relatively developed Americans can be brought under English imperial control.

#### **“THIS NATION WAS THEN BUT RUDE”**

Just as both English and Welsh literature associated Wales with natural marvels and supernatural creatures, so too were the Welsh people often depicted as wondrous relics of a world long gone-by, speaking an ancient language and practicing customs that aligned them more with prehistory than with their English neighbors. For some English authors, this primitiveness justified English political and cultural hegemony over Wales. While English texts often portrayed life in Wales as rustic and brutish, however, the Welsh tradition tended to employ the same

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<sup>30</sup> Harriot, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Hadfield, “Bruited Abroad,” 166.

imagery to argue that this lifestyle was more authentically and historically British than life in urbanized areas. The stock figure of the British Noble Savage appears throughout the corpus of early modern Welsh history writing, often cited as evidence of the antiquity of the Welsh nation. In this tradition, mountains and cave-dwellings play an important role in establishing the Welsh as an aboriginal people connected to the rugged earth. As I have argued in Chapter One of this dissertation, landscape *mirabilia* long held an important role in the Welsh imagination. The medieval literary corpus reveals numerous tales of idyllic and awe-inspiring landscapes forged by the incredible men and beasts of early Britain. Early modern Welsh examples of the Noble Savage motif avail themselves of much of the same imagery as these *mirabilia* tracts, depicting the pre-Roman landscape as a marvelous space with which its primitive inhabitants have a symbiotic relationship. This association of the earliest Britons with preternaturally abundant landscapes informs much of the sixteenth-century Welsh historical writing about the pre-Saxon era. Authors such as Humphrey Llwyd, Gruffudd Hiraethog, and George Owen of Henllys incorporate landscape *mirabilia* in their accounts of the early Britons, fashioning Wales as an Edenic land of plenty populated by prehistoric men and women.

As mentioned above, Humphrey Llwyd's *Breviary of Britain* relies on the figure of the Noble Savage heavily in his defense of traditional Welsh history. He cites numerous classical sources throughout the text that support his claim that the ancestors of the Welsh were the aboriginal inhabitants of the island. From these, he concludes that the Welsh are its rightful owners. This claim is not usual for antiquarians of the time: the antiquity of the Welsh people and the consequent rights this antiquity bestows upon them are common themes in a majority of contemporaneous Welsh histories. Most of these works present the modern Welsh as the standard-bearers for an imagined pre-Saxon British empire led by such luminaries as Brutus and Arthur. Llwyd, however, goes further in his desire to present the Welsh as the lawful custodians of Britain. Just as his contemporaries Elis Gruffydd, Gruffydd Hiraethog, and Siôn Dafydd Rhys argued for the gigantic origins of the Welsh people, Llwyd also turns to the fantastical and

monstrous history of the island to bolster his claims. Not only are the Welsh descendants of the Trojans, he argues, but also of the Picts, the blue-painted barbarians of the insular historical imagination. Refuting Scottish claims to Pictish ancestry, he argues:

Neither were they these, but the Britons, of whom Caesar and others do report that they were wont to paint their bodies blue with woad, that they might appear the more terrible to their enemies. And with us at this day, which seemeth to argue antiquity, blue color is called *glas*, by which name also that herb (not altogether unlike a plantain, very well known now to merchants) is called.<sup>32</sup>

By highlighting the linguistic and historic evidence for the affinities between the Picts, the Britons, and the Welsh, Llwyd seeks to humanize the former, transforming them from traditional British enemies into a vision of noble aboriginal people whose natural rights to the land extend to their Welsh descendants.<sup>33</sup>

Llwyd's reappraisal of the Picts accomplishes two of the rhetorical aims of the *Breviary*. The *Breviary* is largely a response to the critiques of Scottish historian Hector Boece, whose *Historia Gentis Scotorum* (1527) had refuted the Galfridian historical narrative that positioned Welsh history as central to British identity; instead, Boece proposed a mythical history of the island that promoted the dignity of the Scots as well as Stuart political aims.<sup>34</sup> By claiming a genetic relationship between the Picts and the Britons, Llwyd seeks to delegitimize Scottish claims to indigenous land rights by rewriting Scottish history as Welsh.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, he presents the Welsh people in similar terms as he does the Welsh landscape, fetishizing cultural and topographic difference as a virtue that preserves them as autonomous in the face of external threats. Throughout the *Breviary*, he emphasizes the marvels of the Welsh landscape almost as often as he does the veracity of a Welsh-centered version of British history; he cites medieval

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<sup>32</sup> Llwyd, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the reference to plantains subtly link the Picts, the Britons, and the modern Welsh to New World natives and the Welsh landscape to the Americas.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur H. Williamson, "Scots, Indians, and Empire: The Scottish Politics of Civilization, 1519-1609," *Past and Present* 150 (1996): 46-83.

<sup>35</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the text's anti-Scottish sentiment, see Schwyzer, *The Breviary of Britain*, 4-8.



geographic lore as proof of the cultural and historical exceptionalism of Wales. He paints his homeland as preternaturally abundant, describing rivers flowing with marvelous salmon, aquatic monsters called *afancod*, and plentiful mountains. The painted, menacing Picts become yet another marvel that reinforces the historical existence of the Welsh nation.

The landscape of early Wales in Llwyd's text is not unlike the rugged cliffs of *Cymbeline* or even the Virginia of Thomas Harriot. The motives behind these characterizations, however, differ greatly. Whereas the coarseness of Wales and Virginia in the English texts conveys a lack of culture, which in turn justifies further colonization of the land and acquisition of its readily available natural resources, for Llwyd the primitive nature of the Britons reveals a purer lifestyle and a closer connection to a wondrous earth. He cites the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who claims that the perceived backwardness of the Britons connects them to ancient Hellenic civilizations. Here Llwyd quotes Diodorus:

It is reported, that the inhabitants of Britain are aborigines, that is to say first born in the country, leading their lives after the manner of men in old times. In fight they use chariots, such as is said the ancient worthies of Greece used in the battle of Troy. In behaviour they are simple and upright, far distant from the craft and wiliness of men of our age. Their fare is nothing excessive nor costly, far from the dainty delicates of rich men.<sup>36</sup>

In this passage, the image of the Noble Savage is clear: although the ancient Britons may appear to be uncivilized and rude, their lack of refinement speaks to a moral purity and a direct connection to a more honorable and unadulterated human condition. Llwyd carefully avoids explicit claims that the successors of the Britons, his own countrymen, embody these same primitive values; given his ties to the Welsh humanist project of the promotion of the native language and culture, it is unsurprising that he would not wish to insist too forcefully on a depiction of the Welsh that conformed to some of the most negative English stereotypes of their neighbors as boorish cavemen. Instead, Llwyd subtly suggests the ties between the noble ancients and his own people by continually emphasizing the worthiness of the ancient Britons, the veracity

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<sup>36</sup> Llwyd, 131.

of the history surrounding them, and the belief that the Welsh are their genetic and spiritual ancestors. The similarities Llwyd draws between the British past and the Welsh present suggest the existence of a perpetual Golden Age in the Welsh countryside. Although he does not directly portray his fellow Welshmen as the same kind of Noble Savages that Caesar encountered during his invasion of Britain, Llwyd's interest in the geographic wonders of the contemporary landscape certainly suggests long-established ties between the people and a hidden, fantastical natural history.

Other authors of the period similarly conflated the stories of the earliest Britons with tales of wondrous landscapes in order to argue to a pre-Roman Golden Age in Britain. Gruffudd Hiraethog's chronicle in NLW, Peniarth MS 163ii provides a useful parallel to *The Breviary of Britain*: both texts explicitly associate the sovereignty of the Welsh with Britain's fabulous natural history. Like Llwyd, Gruffudd was among the humanists who looked toward the medieval tradition of *mirabilia* in their defense of Welsh tradition. Not unlike their predecessors, the original medieval compilers of such lore, these authors present Wales as an idyllic land of plenty whose autonomy stems from its geographic difference. For example, in Gruffudd's history, he refashions medieval *mirabilia* lists into a narrative of gradual English encroachment into the natural splendor of Wales.<sup>37</sup> Welsh independence from England is framed as the preservation of ancient marvels that have been eroded due to English military and cultural invasion. Thus, everything about Wales, from its enchanted woods to its language becomes a wonder in its own right:

*Tir kymry sydd ffrwythlawn yn y gwastatir a 'r kymoedd i ddwyn pob  
rrywiogaethyd ac aml yw koedydd ynthi a ffynhonau oerion ac afonydd kyflawn o*

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<sup>37</sup> In particular, Gruffudd Hiraethog draws from the section of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* entitled *De Wallia*, a list of Welsh wonders discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation. Whereas Higden is dismissive of the Welsh, contrasting the beauty of the landscape with the barbarism of the people, Gruffudd rewrites his source material to convey the close relationship between the beauty of the land and the glory of its people. A similar relationship exists between the list of Welsh marvels in Siôn Dafydd Rhys's manuscript history (NLW MS Peniarth 118) and his own English source text, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*.

*bysgod. Mynyddoedd mawr sydd ynthi, kyflawn o borfa i vagu pob rrywigaeth anifeiliaid Gwyllt a gwar. Ynddi y kair mwyn pob metel a morlo a main nadd a main lliffo a main melinau a gair yn aml o leoedd. Hevyd kic a ffysgod mor a dwfr kroyw a gwin a meddyglyn a chwrw a ffob peth a 'r a vai reidiol i vywyd tynion ac anifeiliaid mae 'r ddayaren yn i rroi vddynt drwy radau dwv...Mae hi gwedi gossod ynghanol y mor val pe bai dduw gwedi ordeinio yno gell a bwtri i 'r holl ddayar*

The land of Wales, which is fruitful in its plains and valleys, yields every species, and its forests are plentiful and its springs cold, and its rivers full of fish. There are great mountains in it, full of pastures to raise every kind of wild and tame animal. In it one can find ore of every metal as well as coal and carved stones and colored stones. And one can find millstones in many places. There is also meat and freshwater and seawater fish and wine and mead and beer and everything that might be necessary for the lives of men and animals. The land gives this them through the grace of God...it has been placed in the center of the ocean as if God had ordained there a cellar or a pantry for the whole world.<sup>38</sup>

Gruffudd also disseminates and reinterprets various legends concerning monstrous figures such as the *afanc*, the beaver-like creature who had fascinated Gerald of Wales, and various holy wells, backwards running rivers, and other miraculous bodies of water whose continued existence in his own time provides evidence for the reliability of Welsh pseudohistory. If such astounding geographic wonders can continue to characterize the Welsh landscape to this day, he argues, the more outlandish claims of traditional Welsh history seem less improbable. Wales thus becomes a site of wonder, the locus of marvels both geographical and historical.

For Gruffudd, the intersection of Britain's wondrous landscapes, mythical history, and the autonomy of its indigenous people occurs in the body of the race of prehistoric giants who established the earliest nation within the confines of Britain. As I argued in the previous chapter, Gruffudd centers his interpretation of early Welsh history on tales of Albion and her giant sons. For Llwyd, however, the role of the giants as embodiment of a marvelous Welsh past is fulfilled instead by the blue-painted Britons, whose Noble Savagery make them a more palatable alternative to the ancient British giants. Moreover, the fact that their existence can be verified by Roman histories makes them an attractive piece of evidence in Llwyd's defense against the

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<sup>38</sup> NLW MS Peniarth 163ii. A digital edition can be found at Willis and Mittendorf, *A Historical Corpus of the Welsh Language, 1500-1850*.

attacks of Boece, Polydor Vergil, and others. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Llwyd's *Breviary* denies the value or truthfulness of the marvelous traditional history of Wales. Although he does not comment on the existence of giants, like Hiraethog he emphasizes the wonders of the Welsh landscape and their connections to the identity of his countrymen. Even more so than Hiraethog, Llwyd links the existence of marvels with the vitality of Welsh culture: whereas the former mirrors his medieval source material by locating the marvels throughout Wales, the Marches, and southwest England, Llwyd claims that they can primarily be found in heavily cambricized areas such as Gwynedd and Carmarthenshire.<sup>39</sup> He lauds the mountains of Snowdonia, declaring them "scarce inferior to the Alps," as well as the marvelous fish of Llyn Tegid and other areas of northwest Wales.<sup>40</sup> He describes the preternaturally fertile Vale of Clwyd as "a well of a marvelous nature" and praises the ebbs and flows of the sea in Tegeingl, two areas closely associated with the renaissance of Welsh literary culture in the sixteenth century.

Llwyd's location of marvels in the most cambricized areas of Wales is not unusual. For example, Thomas Churchyard's aforementioned itinerary becomes more wondrous the deeper into the Welsh mountains he travels. Similarly, John Speed's maps of areas associated with largely Welsh-speaking populations prominently display monstrous sea beasts and other marvelous feature that mark the landscape as fundamentally opposed to England, which he represents with illustrations of cities, castles, and coats of arms.<sup>41</sup> Despite these shared tendencies,

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<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, with the notable exception of Bath, Llwyd classifies many of the English marvels found in the *Breviary* as Welsh marvels according to the archaic geographic limitations of Wales he promotes throughout the text. He cites the historic delineation of the River Severn as the border of Wales, thus incorporating much of the Marches into the body politic of Wales: "And although the Englishmen do possess beyond the Severn, Herefordshire, the Forest of Dean, and many other places, yet we hold that they dwell within Wales, not in Lloegr, and are taken almost everywhere of all other Englishmen for Welshmen." For more on the importance of the Severn as landmark in the *Breviary*, see Philip Schywyzer, "A Map of Greater Cambria" in *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*, Eds. Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35-44.

<sup>40</sup> Llwyd, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*.

however, Llwyd's work differs sharply from that of his English contemporaries. While Churchyard's and Speed's emphasis on the strangeness of Wales delegitimizes its claims to cultural equivalency and political sovereignty, Llwyd highlights the same wonders to indicate the superiority of Welsh language and culture. In fact, he claims that the least cambricized parts of the land, i.e. the southeast, are "most rudest and coarsest" while those in Gwynedd are ennobled by their ancient language and strange landscape, which leaves them "the purer without permixtion, coming nearest unto the ancient British."<sup>42</sup>

While Llwyd only hints at the connections between ancient barbarians and the modern Welsh nation, other Welsh authors of the period explicitly draw upon the figure of the British Noble Savage in their depictions of their homeland. In his 1603 *Description of Pembrokeshire*, George Owen of Henllys presents the Cambrophone natives of Pembrokeshire, a land so heavily anglicized by the sixteenth century that it earned the nickname "Little England beyond Wales,"<sup>43</sup> as "the remnant of the Ancient Britons and first inhabitants of the country,"<sup>44</sup> living relics of a marvelous past whose existence stands in stark contrast to their English neighbors. Owen, whose writings draw upon the work of Welsh antiquarians such as Llwyd, David Powel, and John Prise,<sup>45</sup> describes the impoverished native population of Pembrokeshire in racialized language that emphasizes their difference as well as their closeness to the land, whose own marvels he enumerates in detail throughout several chapters of the work. He states:

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<sup>42</sup> Llwyd, 122.

<sup>43</sup> Several Welsh authors of the period presented Pembrokeshire as a fragmented, hybridized land, cut off from its Welsh roots and subject to various competing ethnic interests. The contrast between a rustic, cambricized Carmarthenshire and a civilized, anglicized Pembrokeshire also informs elements of *Cymbeline*, in which mountainous home of the Cambro-British princes Arviragus and Guiderius are contrasted with the Roman and British camps in Milford Haven. It can be argued that Owen's description of Pembrokeshire, while reinforcing some of the negative stereotypes of the Welsh language communities of the area, ultimately is an attempt to reinscribe the importance of Pembrokeshire in the antiquarian debates concerning British history in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

<sup>44</sup> George Owen of Henllys, *The Description of Pembrokeshire*, Ed. Dillwyn Miles (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1994), 41.

<sup>45</sup> Dillwyn Miles, "Introduction" in *The Description of Pembrokeshire*, xxxv-xxxvi.

They are forced to endure the heat of the sun in its greatest extremity, to parch and burn their faces, hands, legs, feet, and breasts in such sort as they seem more like tawny Moors than people of this land. And then with the cold, frost, snow, hail, rain and wind they are so tormented, having the skin of their legs, hands, face and feet all in chinks and chaps (like the chinks of an elephant wherewith he is wont to take the flies that come thither to suck his blood).<sup>46</sup>

This description echoes accounts of eastern giants in medieval narratives: for example, several notable similarities can be found between this passage and the description of Copart in *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn*, particularly the sun-baked dark skin and the comparison to elephants.<sup>47</sup>

However, like these medieval monsters, the appearance of the peasants of Pembrokeshire belies their virtue as well as their noble origins. Despite Owen's disparaging remarks contrasting the tall, fair noblemen of the county and its darkened farmers and fishermen, he concedes the well-natured mien of the people and notes the commendations they have received from various outside sources for their military abilities and their endurance. Their lifestyle resembles that of the ancient Britons, whose legacy they preserve and whose natural wonders (such as the stone structures of Pentre Ifan and sheer coastal cliffs of Bosherton) they continue to cultivate.

#### **"THE WELSHMEN USE THE BRITISH TONGUE": LANGUAGE AS RELIC**

By intimately connecting the rustic landscape and its unrefined citizens to the geographic and historical marvels of British pseudohistory, Owen, Llwyd, and their compatriots placed themselves in a long-established literary tradition. Since the medieval period, Welsh authors had called upon onomastic tales of wonder to authenticate their own relationship to the distant heroic past. They sought to confirm the antiquity of geographical features and their connection to figures such as Arthur and Brutus in order to verify the claims of the Welsh romances and chronicles. The landscape in these texts thus becomes a living parchment from which the annals of history can be read. This trend continued well into the early modern period, particularly in the wake of the Acts of Union and the incorporation of Wales into the English body politic. While many early

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<sup>46</sup> Owen, 46.

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter One of this dissertation for a discussion of this text.

modern Welsh texts mirror their medieval counterparts' interest in wells, rock formations, and other wonders (in many cases simply transcribing works such as *Enwau ac Anryfeddodau Ynys Prydein* or Higden's *De Wallia*), they extended their interest in *mirabilia* to include the soundscape of Wales as one of its greatest marvels. Although some medieval authors had cited the sounds of the language as one of the great pleasures of life in Wales,<sup>48</sup> it wasn't until the sixteenth century that historians and humanists began to emphasize their native language as a marvelous relic equal to that of Arthur's tomb or Gogmagog's Leap in order to prove the more remarkable claims of Welsh historiography. Just as the deeds of the ancient Britons had formed the landscape of modern Wales, so too was their ancient language preserved in the speech of the contemporary Welsh. In the post-Acts of Union context, language difference became one of the biggest signifiers of Welsh exceptionalism as well as the most immediate connection between the ancient Britons and the Welsh.

#### WELSH IN ENGLISH COURTS AND ON THE ENGLISH STAGE

The political ramifications of the Welsh language within the Anglo-British political milieu of the Tudor period can be seen most clearly in the infamous language clause of the 1535 Laws in Wales Act that prohibited the use of Welsh in governmental and legal contexts and promoted English as the official language of a newly unified Britain. The Act declares:

because that the People of the same Dominion have and do daily use a speche nothing like, ne consonant to the natural Mother Tongue used within this Realm, some rude and ignorant People have made Distinction and Diversity between the King's Subjects of this Realm, and his Subjects of the said Dominion and Principality of *Wales*, whereby great Discord Variance Debate Division Murmur and Sedition hath grown between his said Subjects (27 Henry VIII c.26).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For example, see Dafydd Benfras's thirteenth-century praise of his home in which he describes the isolation he has felt traveling in non-Welsh speaking lands and the joy he experiences upon hearing the sounds of his native language at his arrival. *Gwaith Dafydd Benfras ac Eraill o Feirdd Hanner Cyntaf y Drydedd Ganrif ar Ddeg*, Eds. N.G. Costigan et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 443-47.

<sup>49</sup> John Raithby, ed., *The statutes at large, of England and of Great Britain: from Magna Carta to the union of the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 3: 1509–53* (London, 1811).

The Act frames the Welsh language as a source of “division” and “sedition” that threatens to undermine the fragile stability of a newly incorporated British polity. The annexation of Wales is likewise conceived as a reunification project meant to recreate a single Britain under the aegis of a single king, an image that hearkens back to Galfridian and medieval Welsh chronicle histories; in this iteration of that popular trope, Britain is envisioned as a historically English space, with Welsh language and culture treated as occasionally dangerous aberrations that jeopardize both the safety and purity of the land. Noticeably, the Act declares English “the natural Mother Tongue used within this Realm,” challenging the linguistic and genetic claims the Welsh have to the earliest British kings. Many have noted that despite the rhetorical flourishes of the Act, it did not seek to eradicate the use of Welsh in the private sphere and in many cases reflected the anglicization of the Welsh gentry that had been ongoing since the late Middle Ages.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the practical implications of the language clause, however, it is clear that the Act not only devalued the Welsh language as an alternative to English, but also positioned it as its antithesis: a linguistic anomaly divorced from any historical roots, spoken only by querulous peasants who wish to undermine the union. Like the monstrous giants of romance or the frightful mountains of chorography, the language of Wales is emblematic of its coarseness and its disruptive potential.

This understanding of the Welsh language and its speakers influenced not only Tudor policy towards Wales, but also English literary depictions of the Welsh, particularly in drama. For example, the Welsh spoken onstage in Shakespeare’s *I Henry IV* by Lady Mortimer, the daughter of Owen Glendower, demonstrates the language’s more wondrous qualities as well as its capacity to incite violence.<sup>51</sup> Lady Mortimer, a monoglot Welsh speaker, can only communicate to her

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Roberts argues, for example, that the literary output of the Welsh humanists in the latter half of the sixteenth century speaks to the continued esteem of the language, noting that by the seventeenth century, religious difference, rather than linguistic difference, was perceived to be most troublesome for the union. Roberts, “Tudor Legislation and the Political Status of ‘the British Tongue’” in *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, 123-53. See also Jenkins, Suggett, and White, 62-63.

<sup>51</sup> William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV* in *The Norton Shakespeare*.



husband Mortimer, a monoglot English speaker, through her father's translation, yet he is entranced by her words and increasingly divorces himself from his own established English identity the longer he spends in his father-in-law's home. He laments his own ignorance of the language, wishing to learn it for himself; his fascination with his wife and her language is depicted as 'going native,' as his marriage to Lady Mortimer marks his descent into treachery against the English crown. Lady Mortimer is depicted as an enchantress who speaks in song and who has the capability to subdue her husband through the beauty of her language.<sup>52</sup> Although they do not speak onstage, the unnamed Welsh women who mutilate the English dead parallel Lady Mortimer: both the women and Lady Mortimer represent the dangers a feminized Wales and its language pose to masculine English civic order.<sup>53</sup>

Lady Mortimer embodies the savage and chaotic power of the Welsh language, the "great discord" referred to in the language clause; the average stage Welshman, however, is often portrayed as too inept to pose much of a threat to English hegemony. Instead, the Welsh on stage are often comically absurd curiosities whose language marks them as coarse and buffoonish in contrast to the Englishmen with whom they interact. Many of these characters do not speak Welsh at all, but instead a humorously accented English that reveals their Welsh origins. In *Henry V*, the Welsh captain Fluellen exemplifies the stereotypical qualities associated with Welsh speech in Renaissance English drama: he inflects his English with Welsh phonetic mutations, misuses English verb forms, and interjects his bombastic orations with the ungrammatical expression "look you," all to comedic effect.<sup>54</sup> Although he strives for legitimacy and power in the upper ranks of the English army, his language permanently marks him as different, incapable

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<sup>52</sup> Megan Lloyd, "Rhymer, Mistrel Lady Mortimer and the Power of Welsh Words" in *Shakespeare and Wales*, 59-74.

<sup>53</sup> Hawkes, 29.

<sup>54</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V* in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

of fully integrating into English society despite his military experience and his close relationship with English royalty.<sup>55</sup>

Other Welshmen who speak their native tongue on the stage fair little better than Fluellen, whose hybridized language is a source of amusement for those around him. These characters, although they lack the humorous verbal tics of Fluellen and his ilk, mirror their English-speaking counterparts in their pompousness and their angry dispositions. Tellingly, the most common Welsh expressions used on stage are phrases like *tawson* (“shut up”) or *digon* (“enough”), which highlight the comic irascibility of their speakers.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Welsh characters often refer to *caws pobi* (“baked cheese”), the stereotypical preferred dish of the Welsh peasantry too simple to desire finer delicacies. For example, the lusty young Welsh prostitute in Thomas Middleton’s 1613 *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* attempts to woo her uncomprehending English monoglot suitor with talk of cheese and whey.<sup>57</sup> The debate continues as to how much of this speech would have been understood by contemporary London audiences,<sup>58</sup> but regardless of the possibility of a bilingual audience, the Welsh language in these works highlights the alterity of

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Babcock, “For I am Welsh, you know: Henry V, Fluellen, and the Place of Wales in the Sixteenth-Century English Nation” in *In laudem Caroli: Renaissance and Reformation studies for Charles G. Nauert, Jr.*, Ed. James V. Mehl (Kirkville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 189-99.

<sup>56</sup> For a list of examples of the Welsh language on English stage, see Bartley and Richards.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Ed. Alan Brissenden, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: A&C Black, 2001). For more on the phenomenon of Welsh and English monoglot lovers on the Renaissance stage, see Megan Lloyd, “Welsh ‘Noise’ and Communicating Couples: Playing Welsh Language and Culture on Stage” in *Speak it in Welsh: Wales and the Welsh Language in Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 129-58.

<sup>58</sup> Bartley and Richards claim “Welsh was probably one of the foreign languages of which a smattering was fairly widespread, especially of course in London and westward. The average London audience no doubt contained some Welsh speakers, and probably a good many members of it were acquainted with a few words of Welsh, even though it had the reputation of being difficult” (40). Lloyd follows their lead, suggesting that we can assume a certain level of familiarity with the Welsh language among Londoners (“Rhymer, Minstrel Lady Mortimer,” 60). Huw Griffiths has recently contradicted this view, however, arguing that by the late sixteenth century, “‘Welsh’ [had] become synonymous with ‘nonsense’” (“‘O I am ignorance itself in this!’: Listening to Welsh in Shakespeare and Armin” in *Shakespeare and Wales*, 122).

the Welsh people, “the most remote and strange of provincials and the nearest and most familiar of foreigners.”<sup>59</sup>

#### “WE CAN’T DISPOSE OF THE ANCIENT TONGUE”

In the face of these external threats (both the devaluation of the language in the English legal system and the degradation of the language in popular culture), as well as the continuing process of anglicization within the borders of Wales, Welsh humanists made the advancement and preservation of their native language a high priority. William Salesbury and other grammarians, for instance, produced Welsh grammars and dictionaries meant to aid those seeking instruction in the language as well as to promote the language as a suitable medium for commercial, religious, and learned purposes.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the campaign for a Welsh vernacular Bible, which culminated in the publication of William Morgan’s 1588 translation, demonstrated the suitability of the language for scripture.<sup>61</sup> Others condemned the Welsh who chose English over their mother tongue: Gruffydd Robert, for one, decried those among his countrymen who he claimed abandoned Welsh for English as soon as they saw the Shrewsbury clock tower, speaking a patois that was not quite either. He describes this language as *cymraeg a fydd saesnigaidd, ai saesneg (duw a wyr) yn rhy gymreigaidd* (“Welsh that is anglicized and English that is [God knows] too cymricized”), recalling perhaps the composite language of Fluellen and other stage

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<sup>59</sup> Bartley and Richards, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Roberts, “Tudor Legislation,” 137-41.

<sup>61</sup> Jenkins, Suggett, and White, 81-83. For example, in his introduction to the 1567 translation of the New Testament, Richard Davies explicitly links the role of Welsh as a scriptural language to the future of the Welsh people. He claims to have rendered the holy writ into the vernacular in order to arouse national pride among his countrymen. He beseeches: *deffro dithe bellach Gymbro glân, vy annwyl, am caredic vrawt ynghrist Iesu: paid ath ddigenedlu, paid ath ddifrawy, paid ac edrych ir llawr, tremia y y vyny tu ar lle ith hanwy* (“Arise, fair Welshman, my dear and loving brother in Jesus Christ: don’t sever the nation (*digenedlu*), don’t be indifferent, don’t look to the ground, gaze up towards the place from which you sprung”). Davies calls upon the Welsh to look back to the traditions of the native Britons, whom, he claims, practiced Christianity independently of Rome in their own tongue. By rendering the New Testament into Welsh, Davies argues that he is partaking in a centuries-old practice of biblical translation while at the same time preserving the dignity of the Welsh. See Davies, “Testament Newydd, 1567” in Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*.

Welshmen.<sup>62</sup> Beyond these practical measures, however, humanist scholars promoted the aesthetic pleasures of the language, lifting them to almost mythical status. They defended their language in a manner strikingly comparable to their *apologiae* for tales of giants, geographical *mirabilia*, and other facets of the culture often disparaged by English critics: by fashioning the language as yet another marvel of the landscape whose existence speaks not only to the antiquity of the Welsh, but also their continued exceptionalism in the present. Even scholars who argued for the position of Welsh as a functional modern administrative language often rooted their arguments in British pseudohistory and focused on the wonders to be found in the strange, melodious quality of its sounds, conceiving the Welsh language as an inextricable component of marvelous Welsh topography.

As humanist authors argued for the practical uses of the language in defense of its preservation, they simultaneously emphasized its sonic beauty as one of its greatest virtues. Several treatises on the language, including those of Henry Salesbury and John Davies, present Welsh as one of the great literary languages along with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, enticing potential learners of the language with its naturally poetic cadence.<sup>63</sup> In a letter addressed to his patron Sir Edward Stradling, Siôn Dafydd Rhys depicts Welsh as especially qualified for the ekphrastic expression of the natural beauty of the native landscape. He opens his missive by describing a performance that he attended of a Latin poem in praise of Stradling's Glamorganshire home. Although Rhys speaks highly of the work, he laments that it was not written in Welsh by one of the local bards who *ildio dim i'r beirdd Lladin a Groeg* ("yield nothing to the Latin and Greek poets").<sup>64</sup> Only a native poet, he claims, possesses the proper language to capture the magnificence of the land. He offers to translate the poem for Stradling so

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<sup>62</sup> Gruffydd Robert, "Dosbarth Byrr Ar y Rhann Gyntaf i Ramadeg Cymraeg" in Hughes, ed., *Rhagymadroddion*, 47.

<sup>63</sup> R. Geraint Gruffydd, "The Renaissance and Welsh Literature," 26.

<sup>64</sup> Siôn Dafydd Rhys, "*Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve Linguae Institutiones*" in Davies, *Rhagymadroddion*, 71-78.

that he might experience *fwynhad dirfawr yn holl gyfoeth adnoddau mynegiant yr iaith doreithiog honno* (“great joy in all the rich resources of expression in this abundant language”). Rhys reiterates the value of the Welsh language throughout his letter, noting that it is a capable medium *i drafod unrhyw gelfyddyd neu wyddor...nad oes raid iddi ildio i gyfoeth ymadrodd yr Arabeg, y Roeg, na’r Lladin* (“to discuss any art or science...there is no need for it to yield to the verbal riches of Arabic, Greek, or Latin”).

Others echoed these sentiments in their works, highlighting the elegance of Welsh and its place among the great historical literary languages of the Mediterranean and the Near East. In particular, Welsh authors praised the tongue’s phonological and morphosyntactic complexity as evidence of its beauty and antiquity. Humphrey Prichard’s preface to Rhys’s grammar describes Welsh as *iaith sydd, heb unrhyw amheuaeth, mor gyfoethog yn ei tharddiadau, yn ei geiriau cyfansawdd, yng nghymhwyster ei geirfa ac yn swyn ei hymadrodd* (“a language, without a doubt, so rich in its derivations, in its compound words, in the worthiness of its words and in the sound of its expression”), surpassing even Hebrew and Greek. Furthermore, he argues, few other languages are as euphonious:

*y mae’r geiriau hyn—y rhai a genhedlwyd neu a blannwyd yn ein pobl ni gan nature, neu a dywalltwyd ynom gan Dduw—mor arbennig a hynod i ni...y maent mor gain ac mor bersain i’r glust*

these words—the ones that were born and bred in our people by nature, that were poured into us by God—are so special and remarkable to us...they are so elegant and so melodious to the ear.

Similarly, in his 1593 *Grammatica Britannica*, Henry Salesbury lists Welsh as one of the *ieithoedd yr Awenau* (“languages of the Muses”) that *allai gystadlu â ieithoedd mwyaf hynafol Ewrop oll o ran swyn, rhesymoldeb, a rheoleidd-dra* (“can compete with the most ancient languages of all Europe in terms of sound, reasonableness, and regularity”).<sup>65</sup> In particular, Salesbury champions the sounds of Welsh:

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<sup>65</sup> Henry Salesbury, “Grammatica Britannica” in *Ibid.*, 93-100.

*Oblegid nid oes dim sy'n well gan nature na dwyn y caled a'r meddal, y garw a'r llyfn, y trebl a'r bâs â'i gilydd*

Because there isn't [a language] naturally better to bring together the hard and the soft, the rough and the smooth, the treble and the bass.

For Salesbury, Prichard, and Rhys, the sounds of Welsh, the same sounds that were mocked on the English stage as difficult and archaic, were the source of remarkable lyrical expression rivaled only by the scriptural languages.

This esteem for Welsh often manifested itself in descriptions of the language that sought to establish it not only as a medium for poetic expression, but also as yet another historical marvel of the Welsh landscape. The soundscape of Wales became as defining a feature as its topographical wonders, and often they were explicitly linked. Thomas Wiliems, for example, argues in the introduction to his 1604 Welsh-Latin dictionary that the language constituted a direct link to the ancient heroic past of the Britons; he beseeches his readers not to *hepcor heniaith y Brytanieit* ("dispose of the ancient British tongue") lest they lose their connection to the chronicles and poets of yore.<sup>66</sup> He frames this connection as a uniquely Welsh attachment to a marvelous past that must be defended and, perhaps more importantly, kept pure from foreign, adulterating influences. Just as others had conceived the mountains and rivers of Wales as the physical remains of a lost heroic age, Wiliems describes the language as *mor rhyuedd* ("such a marvel") that, when spoken in its purest form, connects the speaker not only to the ancient bards such as Taliesin, but also to the hills of Troy from which it ultimately originated.<sup>67</sup>

The writings of David Powel even more forcefully establish the language of Wales as a marvelous relic of the Trojan settlement of the island, observing that its age and relationship to an idyllic pre-Saxon era speak to its status as a wondrous monument to be preserved and cherished. In the preface to his *Britannicae Historiae Libri Sex*, Powel cites the antiquity of both language

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Wiliems, "*Trysor yr iaith Latin ar Gymraec, ne'r Geiriadur cywoethocaf a helaethaf or wir ddileitiaith Vrytanaec...wedy dechreu i scriuenu 4 Maii 1604*" in Hughes, *Rhagymadroddion*, 111-17.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-16.

and landscape as evidence of the veracity of the Galfridian historical narrative.<sup>68</sup> He is particularly interested in the persistence of ancient British place names, which he argues highlight the historical bond between the language of Wales and its physical features. He claims:

*y mae'r hen, hen enwau Brytaneg ar benrhynion, afonydd, mynyddoedd,  
cilfachau a dinasoedd yr ynys hon, enwau sydd wedi'u cadw hyd y dydd hwn, yn  
peri fod ein ffydd yn yr hanes hwn yn cynyddu*

the old, old British names for the promontories, rivers, mountains, bays, and cities of this island, the names that have been preserved until this very day, are the reason that our faith in this history [i.e. Galfridian history] grows.<sup>69</sup>

The onomastic lore surrounding these places speaks to the improbably wondrous histories that lie hidden beneath the surface. For Powel and other Welsh writers of the period, geography is intimately connected to language and history, the latter infusing the former and bestowing it with meaning interpretable only to those well versed in both: a mountain bearing the name of a giant or a fort named for a pre-Roman king, for example, not only tells the story of these figures, but also confirms their existence.

#### **“MOTHER OF ALL LANGUAGES”**

The insistence on the beauty and antiquity of the language in light of the challenges posed by the Laws in Wales Act is unsurprising and in many ways parallels the larger defense of mythical British history that characterized much of the scholarship of Wales in the sixteenth century. In both instances, an external threat (such as English historiography as represented by Polydore Vergil or restrictive English legislation) compelled Welsh humanists to represent the extraordinariness of their culture, reaching back to medieval accounts of giants, landscape *mirabilia*, or onomastic legend to valorize the Welsh in the face of ever-changing political realities. By arguing for the authenticity of chronicle histories or the wondrous qualities of the Welsh language, these scholars confirmed the historical relevance of Wales as well as its value in

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<sup>68</sup> David Powel, “Llythyr Annerch at Syr Henry Sidney, ar ddechrau’r *Britannicae Historiae Libri Sex*” in Davies, *Rhagymadroddion*, 48-54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

the contemporary world. They follow the path laid out by their medieval predecessors in which the strangeness of Wales is ultimately its greatest virtue in the struggle against English hegemony. Furthermore, like their predecessors, the Welsh humanists of the Tudor period drew inspiration from the exotic worlds of the East to be discovered in various travel narratives and romances. Just as medieval Welshmen equated the land of Prester John and the giants of Africa to the wonders of their own land, so too did the Welsh humanists contextualize the marvels of their language in the framework of Hebrew. In their defense of the Welsh language, these authors often extolled the supposed similarities between Welsh and Hebrew, which had the dual benefit of not only being an ancient scriptural language but also a language whose eastern origins, foreign sounds, and unfamiliar orthography captivated linguists and mystics on both sides of the Severn during this period. However, while many English scholars of the language positioned their own language against the mystical, alien qualities of Hebrew, Welsh authors argued for a genetic relationship between the ancient language of their homeland and that of the Bible. If Tudor Welsh historians often conceptualized early Britons as Noble Savages inhabiting an Edenic landscape, their language was characterized as equally Adamic.

The Welsh grammarians' interest in Hebrew aligns them in many ways with their English counterparts with whom they learned the language at Oxford and Cambridge. The study of Hebrew was an academic novelty for Christians during this period: although a handful of incomplete Hebrew grammars intended for a Latinate audience had been produced during the Middle Ages,<sup>70</sup> the language remained generally unstudied by Christian scholars until the sixteenth century, often due to anti-Semitic ambivalence regarding the role Hebrew, and by extension the Jewish people, should play in Christian religious and scholastic life.<sup>71</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>70</sup> Students at Oxford and Cambridge would have had access to the grammars of Roger Bacon and Richard of Bury, in particular. G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 18-19.

<sup>71</sup> Ilona N. Rashkow, "Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21.2 (1990): 217-33.



the lack of a British Jewry after their expulsion in the thirteenth century meant that few Englishmen and women would encounter anyone who knew even a small amount of Hebrew, a fact that marked the language as utterly foreign and possibly dangerous.<sup>72</sup> The language remained obscure throughout Britain until the Protestant reforms of the sixteenth century, the *ad fontes* spirit of which led Biblical exegetics to reject Latin translations of the Old Testament in favor of the Hebrew source material.<sup>73</sup> Drawing primarily from the earlier scholarship of the Italian Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the German Johannes Reuchlin, and other continental grammarians,<sup>74</sup> British scholars turned to the Hebrew Bible as well as certain rabbinical texts to further their understanding of Christian philosophy.

These British scholars took more from their continental guides than simply staid rules of Hebrew grammar: although many of the early modern Hebraists practiced what we would recognize today as sound philological work, others found inspiration in its more fantastical elements. Pico della Mirandola and Reuchlin had both been drawn to Hebrew due to their interest in the Kabbalah, the medieval Jewish mystical practice of seeking the names of God by manipulating the language of the Torah, and their attempts to develop a syncretic Christian Kabbalistic practice held great sway over the way British scholars approached the language.<sup>75</sup> While the study of Hebrew served the political and theological purposes of British religious reformers, the potential for magic and, in the words of Charles Zika, the “wonder-working”

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<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the medieval period, a small, hidden Jewish population lived in Tudor England, notably a group of Portuguese crypto-Jews. However, due to the covert nature of their existence, their cultural impact was minuscule, especially compared to areas of the continent with vibrant Jewish communities. For more, see Israel Baroway, “Toward Understanding Tudor-Jacobean Hebrew Studies,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18.1 (1956): 3-24.

<sup>73</sup> For a detailed account of the importance of Hebrew studies to Protestant reformers, see G. Lloyd Jones, 150-63.

<sup>74</sup> See G. Lloyd Jones, 19-26; and Francis Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19-33.

<sup>75</sup> G. Lloyd Jones, 168-71.

power inherent in the language attracted those who were already predisposed to view Hebrew as an exotic curiosity.<sup>76</sup> For many in late sixteenth-century Britain, learning Hebrew was not only a means to access divine scripture, but also a way to manipulate its letters and sounds in order to uncover secret histories and revelations.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps most famous of these British Kabbalists was John Dee, the infamous Anglo-Welsh courtier and mystic whose theories concerning British mythohistory, *mirabilia*, and language shaped perceptions of the Welsh in the burgeoning British empire.<sup>78</sup> While Dee's characterization as magician has at times been overstated,<sup>79</sup> his interest in antiquarianism and occult history embody the main threads of early modern British Kabbalistic study. In his 1564 *Monas Hieroglyphica*, a treatise on mystical religious symbols, Dee shows a particular interest in the form and sounds of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, imbuing them with wondrous significance and the power of creation.<sup>80</sup> For Dee, the phonetic building blocks of

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<sup>76</sup> Charles Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 104-38. See also Yates, 28-29.

<sup>77</sup> Karen De León-Jones, "John Dee and the Kabbalah" in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Thought*, Ed. Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 149-50.

<sup>78</sup> Gwyn Williams has suggested that Dee's interest in natural wonder, empire-building, and the Kabbalah coalesced and found their purest expression in his retelling of the Madoc legend, which he memorably termed a work of "Cambro-British Israelism" ("Welsh Wizard," 7). For further discussion of John Dee and his influence on the Welsh *mirabilia* tradition, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

<sup>79</sup> Frances Yates, Gwyn Williams, and others have promoted the image of Dee as Kabbalist and magician, an image that Dee cultivated for himself in his writings and public appearances. Williams has gone so far to claim that Dee wished to "establish a quasi-mystical, quasi-scientific, quasi-religious world order" ("Welsh Wizard," 6). Such claims have more recently been disputed by the work of Michael Sherman, who questions the broader relevance of Dee's writings among the political elite, and Karen De León-Jones, who argues that Dee's foray into mysticism was "concerned with a different sort of revelation, that of a new form of numerical revelation that is closer to Cartesian than traditional Jewish Kabbalistic thought" (157). It seems likely Sherman's and De León-Jones's readings of Dee lie closer to the truth; however, in response to such conclusions, we should not in turn excessively minimize the substantial influence of contemporaneous occult philosophy on Dee's works. See De León-Jones, "John Dee;" Sherman, "'This British Discovery and Recovery Enterprise': Dee and England's Maritime Empire" in *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 148-200; Williams, *Welsh Wizard and British Empire: Dr John Dee and a Welsh Identity* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1980); and Yates, 92-110.

<sup>80</sup> De León-Jones, 149-50.

Hebrew are abstruse and foreign, but with diligence can be manipulated to decode divine mysteries: Hebrew becomes wonder manifested in human speech.

Like the India of Prester John or the monstrous races of Africa before it, Hebrew metonymically represented larger concepts of the exotic and the foreign in the rhetoric of sixteenth-century British literary culture. In particular, it symbolized mythologized linguistic purity, dating back to before the fall of Babel and preserved throughout the ages by the divine providence. This aspect of the language, more than its Kabbalistic potential, appealed to Welsh humanists who imagined historical and structural parallels between the biblical language and their own tongue. Although few would argue that Welsh was as old or as holy as Hebrew, the former was positioned as an equivalent to the latter as one of the mother tongues of the world.<sup>81</sup> Some viewed Welsh as a western equivalent to the ancient eastern language, such as Henry Salesbury who claimed:

*y mae'r holl bethau hyn yn peri ein bod yn go hyderus wrth faentumio nad yw'r iaith Frytaneg wedi codi o unrhyw iaith arall, ond ei bod wedi dod i fod fel mam pob iaith yn y parthau hyn ar ymyl eithaf y byd*

All these things lead us to be quite confident in maintaining that the British language has not risen from any other language, but that it has come to be as the mother of every language in these parts on the far side of the world.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, in his introduction to Siôn Dafydd Rhys's grammar, Humphrey Prichard argues that like Hebrew (from which, he claims, languages as far-ranging as Arabic, English, and Slavonic derive), Welsh is also an originary language that dates back to the dawn of time:

*Ond am weddill ieithoedd y Gorllewin, y mae'n amlwg yn farn gyffredin ymhlith rhai o'r dysgedigion mwyaf eu bod yn tarddu o ieithoedd sy'n ddechreuol iddynt, fel petai: Sgoteg a Saesneg o'r Sacsoneg, Sacsoneg o'r Slafoneg, Slafoneg o'r Arabeg, Arabeg o'r Galdaeg, a honno o'r Hebraeg...Ond y mae'n hiaith ni, y Gymraeg, mor gysefin...fel nad ymddengys ei bod yn dibynnu ar unrhyw iaith ddechreuol arall, fel petai honno yn sail ac yn famiaith iddi. Ymhellach, y mae'r Cymry eu hunain, hyd y dydd hwn, bob amser yn eu galw eu hunain yn rhai cysefin, yn rhai a blannwyd yma o'r dechreuad, yn drigolion gwreiddiol.*

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<sup>81</sup> Glanmor Williams, "The History of Welsh Scholarship," *Studia Celtica* 8/9 (1973-74): 208.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Salesbury, "Grammatica Britannica, 1583" in Davies, *Rhagymadroddion*, 99.

But concerning the other languages of the West, it's clear in the common opinion of some of the greatest scholars that they derive from languages that predate them, for example: Scottish and English from the Saxon, Saxon from the Slavonic, Slavonic from the Arabic, Arabic from the Chaldean, and that from the Hebrew... But our language, Welsh, is so pristine... so that it does not appear that it relies on any other earlier language, as if it were its own foundation and its own mother tongue. Further, the Welsh, even today, always call themselves the original ones, those who were planted here from the beginning, the original inhabitants.<sup>83</sup>

For Prichard, proof of the Welsh's aboriginal status can be found most clearly in their language whose strange sounds cannot be traced to an older source. In order to establish the age and prestige of the language, Prichard subtly challenges the popular British foundation narrative of Brutus and the Trojans, suggesting that the roots of the language extend far before the time of the *adventus Bruti*. Instead, he claims that Brutus did not bring the language to Britain with him, but rather that the language existed as part of the natural landscape. The Trojans, he claims, simply adopted it when they settled the island. The language is thus a divine gift, one intimately connected not only to a particular people, but also a particular geography, just as Hebrew belongs both to the Jews and to Israel.

Not all Welsh grammarians were as certain of the linguistic independence of Welsh as Salesbury and Prichard; few, however, doubted its antiquity and its importance to the history of man. John Davies of Mallwyd, the greatest Welsh Hebraist and one of the earliest British practitioners of comparative philology, did not grant Welsh quite the same status as Hebrew, although he counted both among the languages spoken at Babel.<sup>84</sup> Instead, Davies fervently argued for a genetic relationship between Hebrew and Welsh, thereby ascribing to his native tongue all the religious prestige and historical importance of Hebrew, which he describes as *mam yr holl ieithoedd, y gyntaf ohonynt oll, yr iaith a ddefnyddiodd Duw Ei Hun* ("mother of all

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<sup>83</sup> Humphrey Prichard, "Rhagymadrodd Humphrey Pritchard" in *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>84</sup> Erich Poppe, "John Davies and the Study of Grammar: *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae... Rudimenta* (1921)" in *John Davies of Mallwyd: Welsh Renaissance Scholar*, Ed. Ceri Davies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 121-45.

languages, the first among all, the language that God himself used”).<sup>85</sup> Like Prichard, Davies envisions Welsh as one of the great mother tongues of Europe (*ein hiaith ymhlith mamieithoedd Ewrop*) whose existence pre-dates the founding of Britain.<sup>86</sup> But rather than serving as a Western parallel to Hebrew, the mother tongue of the East, Davies insists that Welsh developed in the eastern Mediterranean and moved westward until it established itself in Britain. He explicitly makes this claim several times throughout his work. In a letter to Edmwnd Prys prefacing his 1621 *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae...Rudimenta*, he states:

*Mewn gair, y mae'n eglurach na haul canol dydd fod cryn berthynas rhwng yr iaith Frytaneg a'r ieithoedd dwyreiniol, y mae pob iaith yn tarddu ohonynt, ond nad oes odid ddim perthynas rhyngddi a'r ieithoedd Ewropeaidd eraill.*

In a word, it's clearer than the midday sun that there is a strong relationship between the British language and the oriental languages from which every language derives, but there is hardly any relationship between it [i.e. Welsh] and other European languages.<sup>87</sup>

Davies repeated this assertion over a decade later in the introduction to his 1632 Welsh dictionary:

*ymddengys i mi fod y Frytaneg yn rhy wahanol i bob iaith Ewropeaidd a gorllewinol (o leiaf o'r math sy'n bodoli yn awr, ac a fu'n bodoli dros lawer cenhedlaeth) imi hyd yn oed freuddwydio y gallai fod wedi tarddu ohonynt hwy.*

It seems to me that the British language is too different from every European and western language (at least of the sort that still exist and have existed for many generations) for me to even imagine that it could have derived from them.<sup>88</sup>

In a remarkable act of reappropriation and orientalist fetishizing, Davies separates the Welsh language (and by extension its speakers) from other European vernaculars, highlighting the uneasy position it occupies within its surroundings and envisioning for it an Eastern origin that would simultaneously explain its strangeness and revel in such oddities as proof of its

<sup>85</sup> John Davies, “*Antiquae Linguae Britannicae...Rudimenta*” in Davies, *Rhagymadroddion*, 147.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>87</sup> John Davies, “*Antiquae Linguae Britannicae...Rudimenta*” in *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>88</sup> John Davies, “*Dictionarium Duplex*” in *Ibid.*, 137.

exceptionalism. Here, Davies follows the lead of many of his fellow humanists: just as in contemporaneous writings the British giants had supposedly migrated from Syria and British heroes from Troy, the British language also finds its origins in marvelous Near Eastern history.

Even grammarians less sure of the relationship between Welsh and Hebrew seemed confident that the two languages shared certain similarities in vocabulary and structure. Humphrey Prichard argues that compared to other languages, Welsh possesses a singular ability to form effective, linguistically taut complex words, with only Hebrew coming close in this regard.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Humphrey Llwyd notes the similarity of Celtic and Hebrew place names. Describing the etymology of “Gaul”, he argues: “*Gallia*, now *Fraunce*, was so called of Rayne, whiche the *Hebrues* call *Gal*, and the *Britaynes Glaw*, as who should say, berayned, or ouerslowed by the *Diluge*.”<sup>90</sup> Although he does not explicitly claim a relationship between the two languages, his suggestion that Hebrew and Welsh share a basic vocabulary and that both have exerted linguistic influence throughout Europe is evocative. Others make this claim more unequivocally. John Davies, for example, not only denies the genetic relationship between Welsh and the other European vernaculars, he also firmly rejects the Latinate etymologies for many Welsh words. Instead, he argues for the primacy of Hebrew’s influence on the Welsh language as well as on most other tongues:

*Yna weithiau y mae rhai geiriau Hebraeg i’w canfod yn y rhan fwyaf o ieithoedd, geiriau fel Kir, Kiriath, Kiriath (yn golygu Dinas), y daw ohonynt Carta a Cartago, a Cair (Cairo), dinas fawr yn yr Aifft...a Caer yn ein hiaith ni. Felly’r gair Groeg παλλαχῆ o’r Hebraeg פלגש (Pilegesh), yn rhoi ein Fflilog ni. A’r gair Lladin mensura o מִשְׁרָה (Mesurah), yn rhoi ein gair ni, Mesur, a’r Saesneg Measure.*

Then there are certain Hebrew words to be found occasionally in the majority of languages, like *Kir*, *Kiriath*, *Kiriath* (meaning *City*) from which derive *Carta* a *Carthage* and *Cair* (*Cairo*), a large city in Egypt...and *Caer* in our own language. Likewise, the Greek παλλαχῆ from the Hebrew פלגש gives our

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<sup>89</sup> Prichard, 81-82.

<sup>90</sup> Llwyd, 104.

*Fflilog*. And the Latin word *mensura* from מִשְׁרָה (*Mesurah*) gives our word *Mesur* and the English *Measure*.<sup>91</sup>

Davies provides several more examples of Hebrew-influenced Welsh words, including *ceffyl* (horse), *mochyn* (pig), and *iechyd* (health). Even words that clearly derive from the Latin, such as *mesur* in the above example, are found to ultimately derive from a more Eastern source. Furthermore, Davies suggests that for every word clearly borrowed from Latin a more native, Hebraic word exists, even if its later Latinate replacement is used more freely and more commonly among those ignorant in the complexity and antiquity of their native vocabulary.<sup>92</sup> Doing so allows Davies the rhetorical tools to imagine towns like Caerfyrddin and Caerllion to be connected to ancient great cities like Carthage and Cairo and their residents to be speaking the remnants of the language of God.

The belief that Welsh derived from Hebrew exerted great influence in various grammars, dictionaries, and historical treatises. John Davies claims that there is no language *yn fwy urddasol, perffaith, hynaf, cymwy ar gyfer mynegi teimladau'r galon, a defnyddiol, sef i'r graddau y mae'n cydweddu fwyfwy â'r Hebraeg* (“more noble, perfect, ancient, suitable for expressing the feelings of the heart, and useful, that is to the degree that it agrees more and more with the Hebrew”).<sup>93</sup> In particular, he believes the two languages share phonological similarities, which in turn leads them to share certain prosodic patterns. This observation leads Davies to relate the traditional Welsh poetic form of *cynghanedd* directly to the language of the Hebrew Bible, thus ensuring Welsh a place among the holy languages of Christianity.<sup>94</sup> While few are quite as laudatory of the Welsh language vis-à-vis its relationship to Hebrew as Davies, others provide more specific examples of what they see as the phonetic overlap between the languages.

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<sup>91</sup> Davies, “*Dictionarium Duplex*,” 152.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>93</sup> Davies, “*Antiquae Linguae Britannicae*,” 108.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

When trying to describe the notoriously difficult Welsh phonology to non-Welsh speakers, Humphrey Llwyd relies on Hebrew analogs for some letters, such as the Hebrew *cheth* for the Welsh *ch* and *daleth* for *dd*, despite the fact that the former was far less likely to be widely understood than the Welsh it was meant to describe.<sup>95</sup>

Nowhere is the desire to equate Hebrew and Welsh phonetics more clear than in the work of William Salesbury, whose 1567 *A Playne and a Familiar Introduction* renders the sounds of Welsh as almost entirely cognate to those of Hebrew.<sup>96</sup> Although the work is ostensibly written for an English-speaking audience as a “plain and familiar” guide to the pronunciation of Welsh letters, Salesbury consistently highlights how unfamiliar Welsh pronunciation is to a monoglot English person and laments what he sees as the growing influence of English on the sound of the Welsh language. He recounts the incident that led him to create his book: friends had asked him if “the pronounciation of the Letters in Welsh dyd differ from the English sounding of them,” and he remarks that the language indeed suffers from improper pronunciation. On the surface, he claims that he offers his guide to Englishmen who would conduct business in Wales. He repeatedly claims that he wishes to promote the language as a modern medium of commerce; however, like many of grammarians of his day, he is drawn to the antiquity of Welsh and its position as a blessed tongue. His desire to extol the ancient virtues of his language often run directly counter to his desire to see it thrive in the marketplace.

This conflict shapes the bulk of *A Playne and a Familiar Introduction*, which is comprised of a lengthy explanation of each character in the Welsh alphabet. Like Llwyd, he appeals to Hebrew for many of the sounds and characters that would be unfamiliar to Englishmen, rendering *ch* as *cheth*, *dd* as *daleth*, and *f* as *beth*. Salesbury takes this approach one step further: whereas Llwyd suggests that the more unusual sounds of Welsh have their equivalents in Hebrew, Salesbury presents almost the entirety of the Welsh alphabet in terms of

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<sup>95</sup> Llwyd, 51-54.

<sup>96</sup> William Salesbury, *A Playne and a Familiar Introduction* (London, 1567).



Hebrew analogs. Even sounds that have clear parallels in English are likened to the Hebrew alphabet: for example, *g* becomes *gimel*, *l* becomes *lamedh*, *m* becomes *mem*, and *s* becomes *samech*. Characters that might initially pose problems for speakers are explained in Hebrew terms rather than the more accessible English analogies: *ff* is described as *phe* rather than the English *f* while *th* is equated to *tav* instead of an unvoiced English *th*. Of the twenty-four Welsh characters Salesbury lists, only six are not provided Hebrew analogs and none are given English equivalents, a remarkable choice for a guide aimed at English speakers. Salesbury disregards any similarities Welsh shares with English, effectively exoticizing the language and reinforcing the humanist fantasy of the Welsh language as a historic relic of eastern origin. If Welsh had derived from Hebrew, the language of God, then its divine sounds could still be heard spoken and its marvels preserved on the streets of Wales.<sup>97</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the works of the grammarians, the Welsh language was thought to be as great a wonder as the Welsh landscape, with both being profoundly connected to a sense of national identity based in cultural and historical exceptionalism. The features of its landscape spoke to the great deeds of Wales's past, while tales of the British Noble Savage seemingly confirmed many of the details of the Galfridian tradition, notably Britain's founding by eastern giants and their aboriginal progeny. The peculiarities of the Welsh language were further celebrated as proof of

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<sup>97</sup> The tendency of the Welsh grammarians to view their language as a successor to Hebrew did not go unremarked upon by English authors who used it as a source of humor. In Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, a foolish young English scholar attempts to woo a Welsh prostitute, but mistakes her native language for Hebrew and admires her for her erudition. When he mentions the language difference to his mother who arranged the match, she scolds him for his ignorance: "In Hebrew, fool? 'Tis Welsh" (IV.i.149). Here the humor derives from the scholar's attributing such exotic and learned origins to the words of a prostitute who speaks in her native language about cheese. In other works, Welsh characters did not even need to speak their native language on stage to be misunderstood as Hebrew speakers. In *Caradog, or the Valiant Welshman*, a Roman soldier encounters Morgan, a clown who speaks in a broad, stage Welsh accent. The soldier fails to understand Morgan's speech and informs him of their language barrier. Morgan rebukes him, shouting, "Cood people, doth Morgan speake Hebrewes or no? Understand her not?" (VI.i). Although Morgan speaks English, his speech is so foreign that it could be seen as Hebrew in the eyes of others. Notably, it is the clown Morgan, not the nobler Caradog, who speaks with an exaggerated accent and whose words are mistaken for an ancient language. In both of these cases, the idea that base or comical Welsh characters might be speaking Hebrew is laughable and mocks the claims of learned Welshmen such as Salesbury, Llwyd, and Davies that their tongue belongs to the heavens.

the authenticity of these noble ancient histories. Taken together, all of these traditions presented a strong case for the existence of an ancient, autonomous Welsh culture independent from English hegemonic power.

This exceptionalism was conceived during the early modern period as deriving primarily from connections to eastern antiquity, whether through stories of Syrian giants, Trojan heroes, or Hebrew etymologies. However, as the margins of the world rapidly expanded westward throughout the sixteenth century as England established the centers of its colonial power, much of this same rhetoric found its way into Welsh accounts of the Far West. In Welsh literature of the Tudor Era, the figure of British Noble Savage serves as the prototype for the American Indian as the rhetoric surrounding both merged and influenced each other. In the works of scholars such as David Powel, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, and others, the Welsh landscape parallels not only eastern locations, but also lands such as Brazil, Mexico, and Florida. For these authors, Wales is not only connected to ancient Eastern *mirabilia*, but also becomes the source of American wonder. Availing themselves of the imagery of transatlantic imperialism, these authors envisioned a world in which Wales was not only the locus of *mirabilia* within Britain, but was a universal source of wonder throughout the New World. By claiming a kinship with Native Americans, they present the possibility of a Cambro-American empire connected by shared history and language. In the next chapter, I will show how the rhetoric surrounding Welsh marvels merged with the literature of exploration and found new life in legendary tales of the American Welsh.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE RELICS OF BRITISH WONDER IN THE NEW WORLD

For most medieval Welshmen and women, the monstrous races existed solely in the realm of the imagination; they could be found only in the geographies of the ancients, the pages of romance, and on the edges of the *mappae mundi*. Yet by the fourteenth century, pilgrimage and the expansion of Mediterranean commerce allowed some Europeans to experience the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, and the writings of travelers such as Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone exposed them to the peoples of India and Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> Although many medieval travelers and pilgrims verified some of the outlandish tales concerning the corporeal aberrations and gruesome cultural practices of the people of the East, it gradually became evident that the more fabulous accounts had been heavily exaggerated, if not entirely fabricated. While some abandoned these medieval narratives as fictional, others, such as Henry the Navigator and King João II of Portugal, argued that if marvels had not been found among the Brahmins of India or the Mongols of Cathay, they must exist in lands even further east and further south, lands yet to be discovered by European explorers and traders. A study of the shifting locations of Prester John's empire provides a useful example for the continually changing loci of wonder between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although Prester John's realm was uniformly located in India in the earliest versions of the legend, as European expansionism brought the West into greater contact with both East and South Asia, it became increasingly clear that his kingdom was not to be found there. Thus, during the early modern period, the location of Prester John's territory moved in the popular imagination from Asia to the as-yet unexplored Horn of Africa. Speculation concerning the site of this fabulous land was not limited to eastern regions after the fifteenth century: several explorers in the Americas wrote of the expectation that they might find

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo, the Venetian*, Trans. W. Marsden, Ed. Peter Harris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); Odoric of Pordenone, *The Travels of Friar Odoric*, Trans. Sir Henry Yule (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002).

Prester John, particularly his Fountain of Youth, in the Americas.<sup>2</sup> The movement of wonder from East to West during this period, in part, helped spur the explosion of sea exploration that would define the early modern period: once land routes to Asia had been cut off after the ascension of the Ottoman Turks, new sea routes would take Europeans to lands more distant than previously imagined possible, rescuing the legends of giants, the Blemmyae, and the Amazons from the annals of pseudohistory. To some, it seemed that the legends of the Wonders of the East would soon be verified as scientific fact.

For a brief moment in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these ancient legends seemed to have been vindicated by the discovery of the Americas and the travel narratives of the Iberian, Italian, and English explorers who ventured there. Beginning with the voyages of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s, European literary and political circles were inundated with tales of the strange, exotic peoples who populated the abundant American landscape, tales that echoed the stories of eastern marvels that had long dominated geographies and travel narratives. For example, Christopher Columbus's account of his journey to the Caribbean islands often deliberately borrows from popular Eastern romance, in particular *The Book of John Mandeville*, which was known to be among the works that he consulted during his travels.<sup>3</sup> Other explorers followed suit, borrowing the imagery of fantastic eastern geographies to

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<sup>2</sup> For the mobility of Prester John's kingdom, see Mary Campbell, "Asia, Africa, Abyssinia: Writing the Land of Prester John" in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, eds. Julia Keuhn and Paul Smethurst (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21-37; Bernard Hamilton, "Continental Drift: Prester John's progress through the Indies" in *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes*, Eds. C.F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 237-69; Seymour Phillips, "The outer world in the European Middle Ages" in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflection on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, Ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23-63; and Silverberg, 193-314.

<sup>3</sup> Mary B. Campbell analyzes the use of specific romance tropes that characterize Columbus's writings, concluding that in his work he fashions himself as a romance hero in the mold of Mandeville. Stephen Greenblatt has also noted the influence of Mandeville and Marco Polo on Columbus's writings, although he notes that the latter subverts the tolerance the former express towards those they meet abroad in order to use the texts as a basis for Spanish conquest in the New World. See Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 179-88; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 52-55.

describe the New World. For example, Thomas Harriot described an Edenic Virginia filled with marvelous vegetation drawn from medieval *mirabilia* lists; similarly, Ferdinand Magellan appropriated elements of the popular Spanish chivalric romance *Primaleón* in his description of the Patagonians.<sup>4</sup> Early modern travel narratives often lacked the excesses of their medieval sources; particularly unbelievable creatures such as the dog-headed cynocephali and the lion-faced Donestre do not generally appear among the natives of the Americas.<sup>5</sup> There is, however, a notable exception to the relative lack of Plinian monsters among the diaries and chronicles of American conquest. The writings of these European explorers do not represent the natives as the human-animal hybrids so common in earlier texts; instead, they depict the indigenous populations they meet as occasionally noble cannibals, giants whose humanity is distorted but undeniable. They characterize aboriginal Americans as relics of a prehistoric past, a monstrous image of mankind lacking the civilizing influence of Christianity and Western culture.

This portrayal of the Native Americans as aboriginal giants found deep resonance within Wales during the sixteenth century. Among the Welsh scholars and antiquarians of the period, there was strong support for the pseudo-Galfridian belief that the island of Britain had originally been populated by similarly brutish creatures. Coupled with the belief in the ancestral race of British giants was the tendency in Welsh literature since the Middle Ages to view Wales as the physical and spiritual equivalent to Prester John's India. Given these sympathetic attitudes towards marvelous foreign landscapes and their subjugated monstrous inhabitants, it is perhaps unsurprising that tales of barbarous natives from lands such as Florida, Mexico, and Argentina

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<sup>4</sup> Jorge Magasich-Airola and Jean-Marc de Beer, *America Magica: When Renaissance Europe Thought It Had Conquered Paradise*, Trans. Monica Sandor (London: Anthem Press, 2006), 180-81.

<sup>5</sup> There are exceptions to this trend. Walter Raleigh, for example, remarks upon the stories he has heard of native Guianese tribes whose descriptions match those of the headless Blemmyae of ancient and medieval geographic literature. However, it is notable that while Raleigh claims he has heard of these men, he does not suggest that he has personally come into contact with them. Instead, he dismisses those who have claimed to have met these strange men as simply repeating medieval fables. Other explorers who draw upon the iconography of legendary geography exhibit a similar ambivalence: although skeptical that these creatures might exist, they acknowledge the possibility for monstrosity lurking in the largely unexplored American lands. See Greenblatt, 20-25.

found an eager audience among the Welsh *literati*. What is surprising, however, is the extent to which this Welsh audience identified with these peoples. Whereas medieval authors had employed India and the East as a metaphor for the value of Welsh culture and sovereignty, several prominent sixteenth century Welsh authors, notably David Powel, Humphrey Llwyd, and Siôn Dafydd Rhys, argued that the Native American populations served not merely as a useful symbol for the plight of the Welsh, but were in fact their direct genetic and linguistic relatives. They promoted the story of an eleventh-century prince Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd who had supposedly, after tiring of the infighting among his brothers, sailed to the Americas where he founded a colony of Welshmen who became the ancestors of various Native American tribes. Although this story found popularity among English imperialists in the court of Elizabeth I, who conceptualized English colonization as a *reconquista* of historically British territory,<sup>6</sup> the Madoc legend is fundamentally a Welsh fantasy of power: not only are its origins Welsh, but it continued to hold sway in Welsh intellectual circles well into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates about Welsh statehood.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I will explore the development of the trope of the marvels of the West within sixteenth-century English and Welsh literary circles and how this trope served competing political aims. In particular, I consider the influence of native legends of giants and topographical *mirabilia* upon the burgeoning discourse of British imperialism, demonstrating how these traditions coalesced in the tales of the American Welsh.

#### **“HE WENT TO DISTANT LANDS IN THE WEST”: MADOC AND THE WELSH AMERICAS**

In the past decade, historians of the colonial projects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have located the origins of British imperialism in its establishment of internal Celtic

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<sup>6</sup> Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, 148-200.

<sup>7</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, “Welsh-Indians: The Madoc Legend and the First Welsh Radicalism,” *History Workshop* 1 (1976): 136-54.

colonies, in particular Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Throughout much of the sixteenth century, attempts were made to subjugate the Irish and annex their land under the authority of the British throne, an objective that was finally achieved in 1603 under the aegis of James I. The ostensible aim of the conquest was to complete the incorporation of Ireland into the English polity, a process initiated by the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century, thereby consolidating the British Isles into an archipelagic empire. Most English authors regarded the merger of Britain and Ireland not as a union of equals, but as an act of colonization meant to acquire the resources of a people devoid of independent culture and legitimate claims to their own land. Some, such as Edmund Spenser, performed “a mesmerizing vanishing act” on the Irish, devoicing native traditions by disregarding Gaelic histories and cultural institutions in their own accounts of the land;<sup>9</sup> others like Raphael Holinshed composed new histories of the island that repositioned the Irish as barbarians equivalent to those who rebelled against Rome.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of these texts have noted the similarities between the imagery of England’s insular colonization and that of its overseas imperial projects. The depiction of the Irish as savages in need of colonial correction akin to the indigenous tribes encountered in the New World informs much of the discourse of the Irish conquest.<sup>11</sup> In the chronicle of his voyage to Virginia, for example, John Smith claims that the Virginians “use large mantels of deare skins not much differing in fashion from the Irish

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<sup>8</sup> The scholarly consensus among historians of early modern transatlantic history is that the genesis of English imperialism can be dated to the Tudor conquest of Ireland; however, several prominent medieval historians, in particular R.R. Davies, have argued that the earliest acts of English colonialism can be dated to the Edwardian conquest of Wales of the thirteenth century. See Mark Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies: Class, Capital, and the Literature of Early Modern English Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Willy Maley, *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Gillingham, 392-409; Davies, *The First English Empire*.

<sup>9</sup> Maley, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Richard McCabe, “Making History: Holinshed’s *Irish Chronicles*, 1577 and 1587” in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, 51-70.

<sup>11</sup> Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain*, 12-26; Armitage, 24-26; and Takaki, 21-50.

mantels.”<sup>12</sup> Other colonists, such as Thomas Morton and Roger Williams, echoed Smith’s sentiments that New World savages and the Old World savages mirrored each other. Some have suggested that Shakespeare’s Caliban reflects Tudor racial conceptions of the Irish just as readily as he does accounts of the West Indies.<sup>13</sup>

Although the majority of attention has been paid to the correspondence between Ireland and the Americas in English colonial rhetoric, the Welsh were similarly depicted as barbaric colonial Others. Traditional histories of England’s relationship with its Celtic neighbors have highlighted the relative ease with which Wales was united with England, positioning it as “sycophantically loyal to the crown” in contrast to Ireland’s violent rebellious streak.<sup>14</sup> While it is true that the Welsh integrated more smoothly into English society, with several Welshmen holding high positions in the Tudor court, a tendency to overstate the harmony in Anglo-Welsh relations in the sixteenth century has led some to minimize the ethnic tensions that existed between the English and the Welsh. These tensions manifested themselves in the characterization of the Welsh as brutish and uncivilized. Unlike the Irish, however, the Welsh are often portrayed as Noble Savages whose simplicity and primitive culture function as a silent critique of the excesses of urban society while simultaneously upholding said society’s values. As I argued in the previous chapter, the Welsh Noble Savage signifies a historically purer, albeit obsolete, vision of humanity. Like the Welsh giants of British history, the Welsh Noble Savage embodies an aboriginal state of Britishness upon which the foundations of English empire can be built. And like the giants, this figure found political resonance in Welsh debates regarding natural wonder and political identity.

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<sup>12</sup> John Smith, *A Map of Virginia* (Oxford, 1612).

<sup>13</sup> Takaki, 26-29.

<sup>14</sup> Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain*, 7. See also Schwyzer, “British history and ‘The British History’,” 21-23; and Christopher Ivic, “‘bastard Normans, Norman Bastards’: Anomalous Identities in *The Life of Henry the Fifth*” in *Shakespeare and Wales*, 79-80.



**“IN THE NATIVES WE STILL BEHOLD THE TRAITS OF THEIR ANCIENT BRITISH BEAUTY”**

The representations of the Welsh as Noble Savages connected to distant marvels found expression in the legend of Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd, stories about whom began developing in the latter half of the sixteenth century; tales concerning the prince spread among the English and Welsh *literati* before migrating into the popular culture of Wales where they remain in circulation today. Although these stories vary in some details (such as the location of Madoc’s landing or the tribes associated with the Welsh) depending on the teller, the basic plot remains the same in all versions.<sup>15</sup> The story goes as follows: after the death of Owain Gwynedd in 1170, a civil war ensued among his heirs; his son Madoc, having grown weary of the internal struggles plaguing his land, left with a group of followers in a ship headed westward. Madoc eventually reached North America, where he established a Welsh colony. The story concludes with evidence suggesting that its teller knows of some explorer who has made contact with these groups, now virtually indistinguishable from other American tribes except for their devotion to Christianity and their native tongue, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Welsh. The origins of this tale remain obscure. No reference to such a figure exists in the relatively large body of contemporaneous history surrounding the reign of Owain Gwynedd, and the earliest evidence cited by the legend’s advocates, a fifteenth-century poem by Gutun Owain, has not been uncovered. While there is some evidence that a version of the legend may have been known in the fifteenth century,<sup>16</sup> there is no convincing proof of its existence until the latter half of the sixteenth century. Despite these obscure beginnings, the legend’s Welsh origins are clear: the earliest example of the tale appears in Humphrey Llwyd’s 1568 manuscript history, the *Cronica*

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<sup>15</sup> Gwyn Williams has demonstrated the flexibility of the tale and examined the way in which it adapts to different cultural and historical milieux from its inception in sixteenth-century court society to its use among Americans of Welsh heritage in the nineteenth century. See Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-54.

*Walliae*.<sup>17</sup> Although Llwyd's work remained in manuscript during this period, it found some popularity among both English and Welsh courtiers; it was copied and circulated among such noted figures as David Powel, John Dee, and William Camden.<sup>18</sup>

However, regardless of its Welsh origins, the legend's earliest known uses were in the English imperial propaganda machine surrounding the court of Elizabeth I. As discussed in previous chapters, Tudor propaganda often addressed some of the same concerns as the Welsh humanists of the period. Both appealed to the ancient British past in order to champion their own political and philosophical aims. Just as Tudor authors had looked to Geoffrey of Monmouth to support the establishment of a Britain unified under a single crown by framing unification as a return to the original political condition of the island, the existence of Madoc's tribe in the Americas was presented as justification for the establishment of colonies abroad.<sup>19</sup> If it could be shown that a Welshman had established British dominion in the Americas centuries before the arrival of the Spanish or the Portuguese, this discovery would lend historical credence to England's claim to the land and allow the crown to reframe English conquest as a recovery of lost property.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the English use of the Madoc legend was markedly more anti-Spanish than pro-Welsh.<sup>21</sup> It is not coincidental that throughout the sixteenth century, the supposed

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 44-45. See also Humphrey Llwyd, *Cronica Walliae*, Ed. Ieuan M. Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 167-68.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Llwyd's work could be found in the extensive library of John Dee, whose collection rivaled the largest libraries of Europe and whose tomes were often consulted by many prominent antiquarians and historians throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. Peter French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 40-62 and 194-95.

<sup>19</sup> Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, 182-88.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Greenblatt has noted that this "historical argument" was not uncommon among Europeans during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He notes that along with the British, the Portuguese, Spanish, and Frisians developed legendary narratives that placed themselves among the first peoples in the Americas. Greenblatt, 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> For more regarding the tale's direct anti-Spanish context and the long-lasting effect this would have on perceptions of British ownership of the Americas, see Derrick Spradlin, "'GOD ne'er Brings to pass Such Things for Nought': Empire and Prince Madoc of Wales in Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature* 44.1 (2009): 48-50.

landing place of Madoc is without exception said to be found in Spanish territory, most commonly Mexico or Florida. By declaring the existence of an ancient British colony on Spanish land, the English advocates of the legend made subtle, but concrete legal claims for England based on contemporary maritime law.<sup>22</sup> If the Madoc legend could be substantiated, it would have ensured English legal control over not only most of North America, but also the sea routes over which Madoc had traveled, effectively creating an Atlantic trade monopoly. That Madoc would have considered himself Welsh, rather than English, was incidental: what was important to the crown and its propagandists was that his journey set the precedent for an Anglo-British North America.

The conflation of an ancient Cambro-British Empire and a modern Anglo-British Empire permeates much of the writing surrounding the establishment of colonies in the Americas. Of the texts that explicitly combine these two contradictory imperial visions, the works of John Dee have received the most critical attention. Dee was directly engaged with the works of the Welsh antiquarians who promoted the historical influence of the British people and championed the contemporary Welsh as their natural heir.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Dee's desire to establish a transatlantic English state was shaped by the works of Humphrey Llwyd, from whom he borrowed the term 'British Empire' and whose vision of a Welsh pan-insular monarchy provided him with a historical exemplar for the colonization of the New World.<sup>24</sup> Despite Dee's substantial borrowing

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<sup>22</sup> See Ken MacMillan, "Discourse of History, Geography, and Law: John Dee and the Limits of the British Empire, 1576-80," *Canadian Journal of History* 36 (2001): 1-25; and Armitage, 100-09. Both MacMillan's and Armitage's understanding of Dee's concept of British Empire is based in sixteenth-century maritime law, in particular the expression of the principle of *mare clausum* that would allow the British Crown to lay claim to previously traveled sea routes between England and the Atlantic colonies. By authenticating accounts of early travel to and settlement of the Americas by British legendary figures such as Arthur and Madoc, the Crown could argue for jurisdiction not only over the land, but also what Dee referred to as the "British Ocean," which would connect the British archipelago to the Atlantic shore.

<sup>23</sup> MacMillan, 14-15; Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, 181-88; and Williams, *Madoc*, 61-62.

<sup>24</sup> Dee is often credited with coining the phrase 'British Empire'; however, Bruce Ward Henry has demonstrated that Humphrey Llwyd's *Commentarioli Britannicae Descriptionis Fragmentum*, translated

from Llwyd's rhetoric, however, there lies a key difference between Dee's interpretation of 'British Empire' and that of his source. Whereas Llwyd envisioned an era of reconstituted Welsh power based on the claims of British heritage, for Dee the notion of 'Britishness' was based more on physical geography than ancestry. Although Dee often highlighted his own Welsh lineage, he was among the Tudor unionists who promoted an ecumenical approach to British history, appropriating traditions from all corners of Great Britain and refashioning them into a patchwork insular history upon which all inhabitants of the island could draw. Furthermore, Dee's vision of the boundaries of Britain extended far beyond the physical limitations of Great Britain and Ireland to encompass North America as well as much of the North Atlantic.<sup>25</sup> David Armitage counts Dee as "the first to theorise the maritime conception of the British Empire;"<sup>26</sup> he was fueled by his twin interest in British history and geography to advance the argument that Tudor Britain was a maritime empire whose roots could be located in ancient and medieval Britain. Within this context, the travels of Madoc found prominence: if Dee could demonstrate that a Welshman had traveled across the ocean and established colonies and bloodlines there, he could strengthen English claims to historical jurisdiction over the Americas, which would in turn threaten the prevailing Spanish hegemony over much of the Atlantic coast.

The importance of the Madoc legend to Dee's historical understanding can be seen most clearly in his 1578 *Brytanici Imperii Limites* (translated as *The Limits of the British Empire*) in which he detailed the medieval British sojourns across the Atlantic that he believed authorized

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into English as *The Breviary of Britain*, provides the first extant example of the term. He notes that it is uncertain if Llwyd developed the term on his own, but that its appearance suggests the prevalence that the idea of a British Empire experienced among the web of humanists and antiquarians with whom Llwyd was associated. Bruce Ward Henry, "John Dee, Humphrey Llwyd, and the Name 'British Empire'," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35.2 (1972): 189-90.

<sup>25</sup> See fn. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Armitage, 109.

English western expansion.<sup>27</sup> This manuscript had a small, but incredibly influential audience: Dee held several private meetings with Elizabeth I and her advisors to discuss the work and the role its claims could play in future imperial endeavors.<sup>28</sup> Although Dee's primary interest lies in tales of King Arthur's travels to Scandinavia and eastern Canada, the *Limits* lists the legend of Madoc among its evidence for ancient British *imperium*. He states that in the year 1170:

The Lord Madoc, sonne to *Owen Gwynedd* prince of North Wales, leaving his brother in contention and warrs for their inheritance, sought by sea (westerlie from Irland) for some forein and apt region to plant hym selfe in with sovereignty. Which region when he had found, he returned to Wales againe & furnished hym selfe with shipps, victuals, armour, men, and women sufficient for the colony which spedely he leed into the province then named *Iaquaza* (but of late *Florida*) or into some of the provinces and territories neere ther aboutes, as in *Apalchen*, *Mocosa*, or *Norombega*, each of these 4 beinge notable portions of the ancient *Atlantjs*, not longe synce nowe named *America*.<sup>29</sup>

Dee locates Madoc's "sovereignty" in Florida, which he notes has been appropriated and renamed by Spanish usurpers to Atlantic dominion. He undercuts Spanish control over Florida by suggesting its hidden British past that cannot be erased although its language has changed. Dee uses the Madoc legend to further destabilize Spanish hegemony in the marginal notes to his copy of *Historia del Mondo Nuevo* (*History of the New World*), Ferdinand Columbus's biography of his father, Christopher Columbus.<sup>30</sup> Dee heavily annotated his copy of the text, supplementing Columbus's description of the New World with his own knowledge of the Madoc legend.<sup>31</sup> He offers Welsh etymologies for several Amerindian words that pepper Columbus's account and

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<sup>27</sup> John Dee, *John Dee: The Limits of the British Empire*, Eds. Ken Macmillan and Jennifer Abeles (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> William H. Sherman, "John Dee's Columbian Encounter" in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, Ed. Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 131-42.

<sup>31</sup> Julian Roberts, "Additions and Corrections to 'John Dee's Library Catalogue'" in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, 338-39.

notes that the native system of patronymics must have derived from Welsh naming customs.<sup>32</sup> His comments cast doubt upon some of the fundamental elements of the narrative of Spanish conquest and, by doing so, suggest that Columbus discovered not a new world, but instead a very old language and landscape that had been shaped by the culture of medieval Wales.

The prevalence of medieval Welsh historical lore in this rhetoric has led some to overemphasize the importance that Wales and Welsh identity played in Tudor domestic and foreign affairs. For example, remarking upon Dee's use of Welsh historical legend, Gwyn Williams notes that "it is therefore essential to understand that the story of Madoc first emerged in fact not from this marginality of the Welsh but, on the other hand, from their momentary centrality."<sup>33</sup> Williams is certainly correct that Wales and its culture were less marginal than traditional histories of the period have suggested, and he rightly remarks upon the ways in which Welsh folk and literary tales informed the language of sixteenth-century British politics. Yet it would be a mistake to read the prominence of these themes as an uncomplicated acknowledgement of the fundamental importance of the Welsh to the English elite of the period. Like the Galfridian giants of late Tudor historiography discussed in Chapter Two, the appropriation of the Madoc legend by Englishmen with imperial fantasies speaks more to the erasure of Welsh voices and their subsumption into to a newly formed Anglocentric British whole. It can be tempting to read Dee and other Englishmen who befriended Welsh scholars and even claimed Welsh heritage for themselves as champions of Welsh tradition;<sup>34</sup> however, it is

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<sup>32</sup> Sherman, *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Madoc*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> For a critique of historians who have furthered Dee's propagandistic version of himself as a Celtic *magus*, see Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, 148-150. Sherman claims that writers such as Francis Yates and Gwyn Williams have too readily accepted Dee's more outlandish claims and have, in turn, overstated his knowledge of the druidic and occult, particularly as it relies on romantic notions of Celticity. I agree with Sherman that these connections have led some to romanticize Dee's image; however, I would argue that Dee's ancestral claims, like those of Arthur Kelton or Thomas Churchyard discussed in Chapters Two and Three, should not reactively be disregarded, not only because they remind of the complicated nature of national identity during the early modern period but also for the light they shed on the symbolic uses of Welshness among the English *literati*.

imperative to understand these men and their writings within the framework of larger English imperial contexts in which cultural outliers, be they Welsh, Irish, or Algonquin, could be rewritten into a new British history.

While Dee's own personal interest in Welsh history led to its predominance in his vision of a British past, he by no means promoted the Welsh people as heirs to the nascent British Empire. He demonstrates his ambivalence towards the Welsh throughout *Brytanici Imperii Limites*: although he draws upon the Madoc legend and places even more emphasis on the travels of Arthur, he ultimately suggests that sovereignty has passed from the Welsh to the English, who will be solely responsible for renewing the ancient empire. In particular, he expresses his belief that Edward I of England derived his authority directly from Arthur, a claim that translates the historical foundations of British empire from "the Welsh Brytans" to the English.<sup>35</sup> Within Dee's and other Englishmen's telling of the Madoc legend, the ancient Welsh appear not so much as equals to contemporary English explorers of the Americas, but rather as failed predecessors whose earlier attempts merely set the stage for the establishment of a true British empire helmed by the English monarchy. In this version of history, Madoc and the Welshmen failed to establish a proper colony, instead assimilating completely with local tribes until the only remaining difference between them and the natives was the Welsh language. Many of the accounts of the Welsh Indians mirror the popular accounts of the prehistoric British savage, likening Wales to the primitive New World in such a way as to advocate for the colonial oversight of both. Like their insular Welsh counterparts, the Welsh Indians were to be integrated back into an English whole from which they had deviated.

Dee's account of Madoc deeply influenced other English writers of the time who repeated variations of the tale in their own histories and travel narratives. The Madoc legend first appeared in print in George Peckham's 1583 *True Report of the Late Discoveries*, a narrative of

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<sup>35</sup> Dee, 55.

the author's adventures in the Caribbean and along the Atlantic coast of North America.<sup>36</sup>

Peckham elaborates on Dee's account, establishing many of the elements that would become essential to the Madoc legend in the decades to follow: he reports learning of natives descended from Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd who speak a variant of the Welsh language and offers etymologies of such words as *penguin* (from Welsh *pen gwyn*, 'white headed' bird) and *gwynethes* (a fruit bearing the name of Gwynedd) as evidence. Although he compares the Welsh to the Native Americans, about whose savagery he has written extensively up to this point, it is clear that he mentions the existence of these Welsh Indians only for their ability to grant the English Crown authority over Spanish territory. He states that the medieval establishment of a Welsh colony "amply enlarge[s] her Majesty's territories and dominions, or (I might rather say) restore[s] her to her Highness's ancient right and interest in those countries."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, he describes the Welshman Madoc as "departing from the coast of England" before venturing to Mexico.

Throughout his version of the Madoc legend, Peckham makes a great effort to establish Mexico as an historically English colony. In perhaps the most memorable section of the text, Peckham transcribes a speech supposedly orated by Montezuma, the great leader of the Aztec Empire, in which he confirms the British legend and confesses his own genetic relationship to Madoc that renders him a *de facto* subject of the British monarchy. Peckham quotes the apocryphal speech:

we are not naturallie of this Countreie, nor yet our Kingdome is durable, because our Forefathers came from a farre countreie and their King and Captaine, who brought them hither, returned againe to his natural countreie, saying that he would sende such as should rule and governe us, if by chaunce he himself did not return.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Peckham, *A true reporte of the late discoveries and possession taken of the Newfound-landes*, (London: 1583).

<sup>37</sup> Peckham, qtd. in Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, 41-42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 42.



In this selection, Peckham refashions the famed account of the Spanish conquistadors in which Montezuma mistakes Hernán Cortés as the Nahuatl deity Quetzalcoatl, conceiving Madoc as a native ancestral god and Elizabeth I as his incarnate sent to reincorporate the Mexicans into an English body politic.<sup>39</sup> Peckham neutralizes the power of the Aztecs by claiming that their empire was merely a primitive version of British Empire, one that they would gladly trade to return to their place as subjects of the Queen. The fact that their British ancestors were Welsh helps to explain the Aztecs' cultural primitiveness and natural obsequiousness to English authority rather than suggesting the validity of any Welsh claims of dominion in the Americas.

This version of the Madoc tale found popularity through the travelogues of other English imperialists and adventurers. In the second volume of his sweeping *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, which collected English travel narratives from the eastern voyages of the Middle Ages to contemporaneous explorations of the Americas, Richard Hakluyt reprinted Peckham's account of Madoc and Montezuma.<sup>40</sup> That Hakluyt would have been drawn to such a tale is unsurprising: though considered an important historical and geographic source for explorers over multiple generations, *The Principle Navigations* often veers into the territory of the marvelous and legendary, owing much to Mandeville and other fantastic medieval travel narratives.<sup>41</sup> The story of Madoc appears in two forms in Hakluyt's chronicle: the

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<sup>39</sup> The legend of Cortés being recognized as Quetzalcoatl among the Mesoamerican tribes held an important place in Spanish narratives surrounding the establishment of American colonies. There is, however, little evidence that Cortés was mistaken for Quetzalcoatl. Furthermore, it appears that Quetzalcoatl was not viewed as a messianic figure in Nahuatl religions. Stories of Quetzalcoatl as a messianic deity were likely created in the 1530s by Franciscan authors who wished to analogize Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ and to establish Spanish conquest of the Americas as divinely ordained. In this way, Peckham's treatment of the Cortés legend mirrors his treatment of the Madoc legend: in both cases, he transforms deeply nationalistic tales from other cultures into justification for the establishment of English empire. Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 108-30.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation: Made by Sea or Over Land to the Most Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at Any Time within the Compasse of These 1500 Years: Divided into Three Several Parts* (London: 1589).

<sup>41</sup> For more on Hakluyt's interest in fabulous geography, see Mary Fuller, "Arthur and the Amazons: Editing the Fabulous in Hakluyt's *Principle Navigations*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 41.4 (2011):

first is the version provided by Peckham and the second a borrowing of David Powel's redaction of the tale (discussed below). He repeats the common elements of both tales: that Montezuma and the Aztecs had descended from Madoc ab Owain Gywnedd, that they spoke a form of Welsh, and that they had been awaiting the return of their British ancestors. Hakluyt's account reveals a more spirited colonial impulse than even that of Peckham. Some have argued that the primary function of *The Principle Navigations* appears to be the consolidation of earlier claims for English dominion of the Americas to present a stronger, more unified case for colonization.<sup>42</sup> This motive is exceptionally clear in Hakluyt's rendering of the Madoc legend. Whereas the colonial fantasies of Dee and Peckham allude to the importance Madoc played in the establishment of a Tudor America, Hakluyt explicitly states how the legend of Madoc justifies the rule of Elizabeth I over Spanish territories:

These be the very wordes of *Mutezuma* set downe in the *Spanish Chronicles*, which being throughly considered, because they haue relation to some strange noble person, who long before had possessed those countreys, doe all sufficiently argue the vndoubted title of her Maiestie: forasmuch as no other Nation can truely by any Chronicles they can finde, make prescription of time for themselues, before the time of this Prince *Madoc*.<sup>43</sup>

While the existence of Madoc establishes legal precedence for Elizabeth's legal claims to command over an Atlantic Empire, Hakluyt does not belabor the queen's Welsh heritage nor does he draw any sort of genetic relationship between the English monarchy and the Welsh prince. Instead, he describes the Welsh Indians as "remote, barbarous, and heathen" in contrast to the noble English under whose control they belong.

The tendency to simultaneously uphold the legend of Madoc as a legal justification for English rule while simultaneously dismissing the Welsh language and culture extant among the

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173-81; and Julia Schleck, "'Plain Broad Narratives of Substantial Facts': Credibility, Narrative, and Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.3 (2006): 768-94.

<sup>42</sup> John Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization, 1558-1625" in *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 1, Ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 55-64.

<sup>43</sup> Hakluyt, *The Principle Navigations*, Part II, Vol. III, 173.

Native Americans as barbaric relics permeates many of the English redactions of the tale. Even accounts more superficially sympathetic to the Welsh and their role as imperial forerunners ultimately rely on negative stereotypes of both the Welsh and their American relatives as naturally subservient to the English throne. For example, in a 1595 letter Walter Raleigh describes the Welsh Indians as “noble and native Mexicans owning...their descent from the Brittons” and goes so far as to designate Mexico “The Empire of Madock.”<sup>44</sup> The Aztecs owe their nobility to their ancestors, the Welsh conquerors of the Americas, “brave adventurers” who bore a line of “emperors of Mexico” from which Montezuma derived. Despite this illustrious pedigree, however, Raleigh notes in no uncertain terms that the arrival of an English fleet would mark the end of Cambro-Mexican power, which serves only as an imperial placeholder until the English can make their rightful claims on the land. The Welsh and the Mexicans are examples of loyal subjects who must “submit unto and remain in the Allegiance and Obedience of My said Royale Mistresse the Princess Elizabeth Queen of England.”<sup>45</sup> Raleigh repeats the legend of a Welsh-speaking Montezuma who surrenders control of the Aztec empire to the Queen, suggesting that the natives will welcome the transition from Cambro-Mexican to English authority as a reunion into a larger British body politic. For those who resist, the threat of violence looms clearly in Raleigh’s text; he calls to mind not only the English war against the Spanish, but also conflicts between the crown and internal resistance, the specter of which hangs over Raleigh and other English imperialists’ retelling of the Madoc legend.

#### **“OF THIS MADOC THERE BE MANY FABLES”**

The Madoc legend exerted just as much propagandistic weight in Wales as it did in England, despite the fact it did not achieve the same level of popularity in the former during the sixteenth century. Although the legend would later experience great acclaim among the Welsh

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<sup>44</sup> Raleigh, qtd. in Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, 119-20.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

and Welsh-Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,<sup>46</sup> even earning the title “The Mabinogion of the West” in a 1911 notice published in *The William and Mary Quarterly*,<sup>47</sup> during the Tudor era it appears more frequently in English texts. When it does appear in the works of Welsh authors, however, it carries similar force to the legends of Arthur, Owain Glyndŵr, and other figures synonymous with the idea of Welsh nationhood. During this period, Madoc and his American descendants primarily appear in Welsh histories and chronicles, functioning as evidence of an alternative history in which the turmoil following the dissolution of the kingdom of Gwynedd and the eventual loss of Welsh sovereignty is replaced by the establishment of a global Welsh empire. The language of empire infuses both the English and Welsh tellings of the legend; yet Welsh variations seek more than justification for European rights to an already-occupied land. From its earliest appearance in the history of Humphrey Llwyd to its use by Siôn Dafydd Rhys, the Welsh Madoc legend highlights not only the prospect of Welsh hegemony, but also the similarities between the Welsh people and those of the Far West. Just as India, Syria, and other Eastern locales had been employed to emphasize the wondrousness of Wales and its fundamental differences from its English rulers during the Middle Ages, the early Welsh Madoc legends demonstrate the affinity between the Welsh and the Native Americans, suggesting the possibility for both to resist colonial rule.

Although the tale first appeared in the works of Llwyd, its fullest early Welsh expression can be found in David Powel’s 1584 *History of Cambria*.<sup>48</sup> Powel’s history, ostensibly an English translation of Llwyd’s earlier *Cronica Walliae* (itself a liberal rendering of the medieval *Brut y*

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<sup>46</sup> Williams, “Welsh Indians,” 136-54.

<sup>47</sup> Alfred J. Morrison, “The Mabinogion of the West,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19.3 (1911): 163-65.

<sup>48</sup> Schwyzer, ed., *The Breviary of Britain*.

*Tywysogion*),<sup>49</sup> became a primary source of the Madoc legend for Tudor authors, who cited it frequently or, in the case of Hakluyt, directly quoted the work. Powel foregrounded several of the elements that would become essential to the anti-Spanish versions prevalent in the late sixteenth century, including the location of Madoc in Mexico, the speech of Montezuma, and many of the examples of Welsh lexical influence in the Americas.<sup>50</sup> Yet however similar to contemporary English versions of the legend Powel's account might be, the conclusions it draws about the relationship between the medieval Welsh explorers and their American progeny differ greatly from those of his English counterparts. Powel (and his predecessor Llwyd) belonged to the same intellectual circles as Dee and Hakluyt, as well as other English *literati* and explorers who pressed for English resistance against Spanish rule of the Americas.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, some of the same anti-Spanish sentiment colors this episode in the Welsh history as well. But while this sentiment is the primary focus of the English texts, the Welsh Madoc legend emphasizes the similarities between the Welsh and the Americans rather than the conflict between the English and the Spanish. Powel continually returns to the marvel of the landscape and the hope for renewal it presents to Madoc and his men. He declares that Madoc reached "a land unknown where he saw many strange things," including preternaturally fruitful lands filled with vegetation and wildlife.<sup>52</sup> Powel contrasts this natural abundance to the Wales of Madoc's day, which had become "barren and wild ground" due to the series of civil wars that plagued Gwynedd in the aftermath of the death of

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<sup>49</sup> Schwyzer notes that while the work was marketed as a translation of Llwyd, it is over three times the length of the *Cronica* and contains much original material. *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Schwyzer has demonstrated the complicated relationship between English and Welsh intellectuals in the late sixteenth century. The works of Welsh antiquarians were respected and circulated among English authors and were often funded by English patrons; at the same time, Welsh intellectuals were often racialized by these same readers and patrons who simultaneously viewed Welsh history as a curiosity and a fundamental aspect of British imperial history. See Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory*, 76-96. For more on the interdependent relationship between English and Welsh strains of antiquarianism, see French, 188-209.

<sup>52</sup> David Powel, *History of Cambria* in Schwyzer, *The Breviary of Britain*, 157.

Owain Gwynedd. While Wales had once been an equally marvelous and verdant landscape full of aboriginal giants and remarkable topographical features, its wonders had faded due to the increasing internal violence and external political pressures that would define much of the history of medieval Wales. In escaping this “barren and wild” landscape for the marvels of the Americas, Powel suggests, Madoc and his men, whom he describes as “desirous to live in quietness,” returned to a purer existence similar to the idyllic state of the early inhabitants of Britain. Notably, unlike his English contemporaries, Powel does not mention Queen Elizabeth or suggest that Madoc’s journey set a precedent for English colonization of Mexico. Instead, he presents Mexico as a Welsh utopia and the natives as living relics of the distant Welsh past, insinuating the same westerly movement of wonder that explained the presence of Syrian giants in Britain during earlier periods of insular history.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the seemingly disparate lifestyles of the contemporary Welsh and the Mexicans, Powel is intrigued by the way that Welsh culture translates throughout time and space and unites these wondrous people with his own countrymen. In particular, he is drawn to the linguistic similarities between the two groups and remarks upon the way the Welsh language has been preserved on a foreign continent. He offers multiple examples of locations whose names reveal hidden Welsh onomastic lore, suggesting that just as marvelous Welsh history shaped the physical landscape of Britain so too did it shape that of the Americas. He claims:

The British words and names of places used in that country even to this day do argue the same: as when they talk together, they use the word *Gwranddo*, which is hearken or listen. Also they have a certain bird with a white head, which they call *Pengwin*, that is white head. But the Island of *Corroeso*, the cape of *Bryton*, the river of *Gwyndor*, and the white rocke of *Pengwyn*, which be all *Brytish* or *Welsh* words, do manifestly show that it was that country which Madoc and his people inhabited.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter Two of this dissertation.

<sup>54</sup> Powel, 158.

While Powel repeats the usual example of the penguin, which appears in almost every sixteenth-century account of the legend, he places more emphasis on the way in which the language has left its mark upon the landscape in the form of place names, just as Siôn Dafydd Rhys, Humphrey Llwyd, and others had looked to Welsh place names to verify legendary British history. Furthermore, he also suggests that the language has not only been memorialized in the names of capes and islands, but also continues to live as a spoken language among the Mexicans. By suggesting that they use the word *gwrando*, a common Welsh verb, to address each other, Powel indicates that Wales and Mexico have a shared soundscape as well as a shared history: that is, the streets of Montezuma's empire sonically mirror those of Wales.

For Powel, the Welsh language is inextricably tied to the marvelous landscape and people of both his own country and the Far West, a fact that links the two lands and establishes the language as a marvel in its own right. The linguistic *translatio imperii* that Powel suggests occurs between Wales and Mexico mirrors the relationship he proposes between Hebrew and Welsh, in which marvel is translated westward through speech.<sup>55</sup> The concept of soundscape provides a useful framework for understanding the descriptions of language and sound in the early Welsh legends of Madoc. Primarily a term employed by musicologists to describe the acoustics of natural and artificial environments, it has found wider use among social scientists and linguists who explore the ways that sound creates and contains physical space.<sup>56</sup> For Powel, Wales and Mexico can be at least partially defined by the sonic environment they share, a fact that ultimately

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>56</sup> The development of sound studies mirrors the growing interest in ecocritical approaches throughout the humanities. Within the field of musicology, R. Murray Schafer was the first to employ the term, positioning the sonic environment of nature against the sounds associated with urbanity and technological change and examining the ways human activity has altered the soundscape of nature as much as it did the landscape. Social historians interested in the history the senses have incorporated these ideas into their work, charting diachronic histories of sound as it affected and defined human experience. For examples, see Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Douglas Pocock, "Sound and the Geographer," *Geography* 74.3 (1989): 193-200; Mark M. Smith, "Making Sense of Social History," *Journal of Social History* 37.1 (2003): 165-86; and Eric Wilson, "Plagues, Fairs, and Street Cries: Sounding out Society in Early Modern London," *Modern Language Studies* 25.3 (1995): 1-42.

unites the landscapes and the peoples. Powel was not the first to speculate the ways in which the sounds of the New World paralleled those of Wales.

Although he does not mention the Madoc legend specifically in *The Breviary of Britain*, Humphrey Llwyd remarks upon the similarities he imagines between Welsh and Mexican speech as part of his larger discussion of the similarities between Welsh and Hebrew. Discussing what he considers the distinctiveness of the *ll* phoneme in Welsh, he remarks that it is unique among European languages and that only the *ll* found in Mexican speech approximates its sound:

We have also a peculiar letter to ourselves, which the ruder sort fashion like LL, but the better-learned write with LH. I am not ignorant that the Spaniards have in use *ll*, and so have the Germans *lh*... But neither of these expreseth ours; howbeit, I take it rather that the Mexicani which inhabit the new-found world do use that letter, which the Spaniards express by *ll*.<sup>57</sup>

Remarkably, Llwyd eschews any possible connections between Welsh and other European languages, finding its equivalence instead in the language of Mexico; he disregards the fact that the *ll* of the “Mexicani” speech likely reflected the language of the Spanish conquistadors. Stephen Greenblatt has noted that among the many contrasts between the native and their own culture upon which European travelers often remarked, they tended to fetishize language difference as perhaps the most marvelous of the many curiosities that the New World had to offer.<sup>58</sup> If this is the case, Llwyd and Powel’s insistence that Welsh and the language of Mexico parallel each other is that much more striking. Just as medieval and early modern Welsh authors linked Wales and the East by arguing that they shared similar topographic marvels and wondrous creatures such as giants, so too did they suggest that Mexico and Wales were linked through a shared soundscape, a connection established by the legendary heroes of Wales. If the ancient history of Wales could be bound to the marvels of the East, then the future of Wales was to be found in its ties to those of the Americas.

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<sup>57</sup> Llwyd, *Breviary of Britain*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> Greenblatt, 24.



### “A MIRROR IN WHICH TO SEE ONESELF”: THE PATAGONIA OF SIÔN DAFYDD RHYS

The marvelous history of the Welsh as aboriginal Britons and their role as the genetic, cultural, and linguistic progenitors of the Americas cannot easily be differentiated. Language and topography are closely related in both narratives: onomastic lore connects language to landscape, which in turn had been forged by the deeds of gigantic forefathers. Llwyd and Powel merely allude to this interdependence by incorporating tales of Madoc and the Mexicans within their larger accounts of British pseudohistory. On the other hand, Siôn Dafydd Rhys's treatise in National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 118 explicitly unites the history of ancient British giants and the tales of Welsh Indians, positioning Madoc as a second Brutus establishing a Welsh colonial presence in the Americas. Moreover, Rhys draws upon continental accounts of American giants to buttress his claims, incorporating them into his chronicle as further proof of the veracity of Welsh giant lore. As discussed in previous chapters, Rhys's history provides a lengthy *apologia* for Galfridian history in general and the existence of British giants in particular. He draws from myriad sources, ancient and modern, foreign and Welsh, in order to prove the existence of marvelous men both in Britain and abroad, positioning Wales as the source of such natural phenomena. Immediately preceding his lengthy section on the giants of Welsh folklore, Rhys includes a Welsh translation of a passage from Richard Eden's 1555 *The Decades of the Newe World or West India*, itself a translation of the Italian Antonio Pigafetta's 1525 account of Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe.<sup>59</sup> This account, in which Magellan and his men land in Patagonia and discover a race of native giants, is completely absorbed into Rhys's vision of Welsh history and raises the possibility of not only the relationship of the Welsh and the Americas through Madoc's journey, but also the existence of monstrous aboriginal giants within

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<sup>59</sup> A partial diplomatic edition of NLW MS Peniarth 118 can be found in Chris Grooms, *The Giants of Wales*, 288-95. A modern English translation of Pigafetta can be found in Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage around the World, 1519-1522: An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, Ed. and Trans. Theodore J. Cachey Jr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). For Eden, see *The Decades of the Newe World or West India* (London, 1555). As of this writing, no modern edition exists of Eden's work.

both lands. The ancient British giants that Brutus had encountered mirror the Patagonians enslaved by Ferdinand Magellan, and the fate of both speaks to the erasure of the marvelous in the face of colonization.

By incorporating Eden's translation of Pigafetta's *The First Voyage around the Globe* into his treatise, Rhys establishes his place firmly within the cultural zeitgeist of late Tudor Britain. The publication of Pigafetta's journal had renewed interest in the question of the existence of giants within English and Iberian societies, and many explorers set off either to witness the Patagonian giants themselves or to prove Pigafetta a liar.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, Rhys falls firmly on the side of the existence of South American giants. Whereas the other giants in Rhys's history are long dead, relics of a long-forgotten marvelous past, Rhys argues that that the Patagonians are living links to Gogmagog and other giants of medieval lore, having been seen and described by some of the most notable explorers of recent history. He states:

*Ac hedhiw a heno y maent cewri yn byw obhywn amrybhaelon wledyd o'r byd...y mae yn dhigawn hawdh canbhod yn yr hystoriaev a'r lhythyrev, a yscribhennwyd yn hwyr o bhlynydhev, ac yn eyn hamseroedh ni hebhyd, am y gwledyd dieithr estronawl a gorlhewinawl. Ac ebh a ganbhwyd bod yn y gorlhewin pelh, ac o'r tv dehev gorlhewinawl i gybhandir Brasilia, wlad wylht belh ehalaeth oerlhyd iawn, yr honn a elwir Terra Gigantum gwlad y cewri: a'r cewri a gybhanhedhynt yr awr honn y wylhtwlad honno, a elwir hedhiw a heno Patagonieid.*

Even now, giants live within various countries of the world...They are quite easily found in the histories and letters that were written many years ago as well as in our own time about the strange, foreign lands in the west. They have been discovered to exist in the far west and on the southwestern shores of the continent of Brazil, a wild, distant, plentiful, and extremely cold land, which is called Terra Gigantum, the land of the giants. And the giants who now inhabit that wild land are currently called the Patagonians.<sup>61</sup>

As I have shown in Chapter Two, Rhys often conceptualizes giants as fossils buried underneath the surfaces of mountains whose existence speaks to subterranean histories that threaten a

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<sup>60</sup> Fernanda Peñaloza, "Myths and Realities: Mapping Scientific, Religious, Aesthetic, and Patriotic Quests in Patagonia" in *Patagonia: Myths and Realities*, Eds. Fernanda Peñaloza, Jason Wilson, and Claudio Canaparo (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 1-26.

<sup>61</sup> Grooms, 288. All translations of Rhys's text are my own.

deceptively uniform landscape. Although he likens Welsh giants to the giants of other European traditions, these giants only exist as skeletons hidden underneath volcanoes and within mountain caves. By contrast, the Patagonian society remains vibrantly alive in a land so populated by giants that it is known as *Terra Gigantum*, a name that recalls one of Rhys's archaic names for Britain, *Ynys y Cewri*. His insistence on the relationship between the Welsh giants of history and what he considers the very real contemporary giants of Patagonia suggests that although Welsh giants may only live on as fossils, their memory still holds considerable power as their Patagonian descendants continue to forge the landscape of South America.

What follows this introduction is Rhys's translation of Eden's text, which adheres to the same basic narrative structure as its source. Both versions present an archetypal colonial narrative in which Western explorers encounter, engage, and ultimately capture a native population; both are episodic in nature. In the first episode, Magellan and his men make initial contact with the Patagonians through the aid of a friendly giant who welcomes them on the shore. The giant is astonished by the appearance of the conquistadors, whom he greets as messengers sent from the heavens. In return for his generosity, Magellan presents the giant with a mirror. When the giant sees his own reflection in the mirror, he recoils in horror at his visage as well as the barbaric clothing he wears. The second episode observes the same pattern as the first: a friendly giant joins Magellan's crew aboard their ship where he receives a mirror along with bells, a rosary, and fine linen clothing. The sailors christen this giant John and teach him how to pronounce his name as well as several prayers in their language. Soon afterwards John disappears, and Magellan and his men assume that his fellow giants have killed him out of jealousy for his friendship with the explorers. The final episode among the Patagonian giants is the longest and by far the most violent. Again, Magellan's crew spots giants on the shore; however, these giants are far different from John and his nameless predecessor. Unlike their naïve peers, they have hidden weapons among the bushes and intend to attack the Western interlopers. Aware of their plot, Magellan is able to lure the giants away from their weapons with the same mirrors, bells, and beads that had

entranced the friendlier giants, and he eventually tricks them into allowing him to attach shining iron fetters to their legs. Once the giants realize they have been enslaved, they become enraged and cry out to their god Setebos for help. Through a series of complicated events, the giants are able to free themselves and escape, but not before slaughtering one of Magellan's men. Afterwards, the Spanish crew sails off with the giants they were able to capture, and they continue on their way towards the Pacific islands.

The histories of Eden and Rhys recount the same basic narrative. However, while Eden's account closely mirrors his source material (i.e. Pigafetta's *The First Voyage Around the World*), Rhys shows more willingness to challenge Eden's assumptions, altering the language and some of the narrative detail found in his source text.<sup>62</sup> Pigafetta had intended his account to be a celebration of Spanish naval power, the martyrdom of Magellan, and Pigafetta's own heroism in facing the dangers of the far western world.<sup>63</sup> Although Eden's translation is not as unambiguously laudatory of Magellan and his expedition, its relatively positive portrayal of Spanish colonial practice is uncommon in English works of the period, a fact likely reflecting the careful balance Eden had to maintain as an English imperialist seeking favor in a pro-Spanish Marian court.<sup>64</sup> Rhys shared none of these concerns; instead, he employed the story of Magellan's

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Householder has noted the lack of variance between Eden's translations and their sources, even when they contradict English imperial interests. He claims that Eden's "translations are for the most part consistent with the original, his attempts to shape the reader's reception for the most part limited to prefatory material and marginal comments...Eden's praise for the exploits of the *conquistadores* places them in the company of Alexander and the heroes of Roman history" (34). Householder, "Eden's Translations: Women and Temptation in Early America," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.1 (2007): 11-36.

<sup>63</sup> Theodore J. Cachey Jr, "Introduction" in Pigafetta, *The First Voyage around the World, 1519-1522: An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, xxiii.

<sup>64</sup> Although Eden's work has drawn relatively little critical attention, scholars who have considered the text often focus on the political contexts of the composition of *The Decades of the Newe World*, in particular the way in which it seems to align itself with Spanish colonial interests even more so than its primary source, the *De Orbo Novo Decades* of Peter Martyr. David Gwyn and other have positioned Eden within the civil unrest accompanying the Marian reign of the mid-1550s, arguing that Eden presented a pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic account of American colonization so as to appear supportive of Mary I and her Spanish husband and thus avoid the persecution suffered by those critical to the crown. Others have complicated this reading, demonstrating an underlying ambivalence characterizing Eden's work. Andrew Hadfield, for

voyage as evidence in his defense of the legendary early Welsh history. For Rhys, the heroes of the story are not Magellan and the conquistadors, but rather the Patagonian giants whom he considers direct, indisputable evidence of the existence of the giants of Wales. He transforms the narratives of Pigafetta and Eden to construct a sympathetic portrayal of the Patagonians, whom he envisions as Noble Savages inhabiting an idyll unencumbered by European invention. Rhys frequently omits particularly gruesome details from his translation, providing his readers with a significantly less grotesque portrayal of life in Patagonia than does his source. For example, Eden follows the template of Pigafetta in describing the the giants as naked and dangerous ‘canibales’ who perform gruesome acts of bodily modification and whose very existence stands in marked contrast to the dignity of their European counterparts; Rhys, on the other hand, remains silent regarding the more fantastical elements of the giants’ manner and appearance. When he does describe the giants’ appearance, he does so without the same sense of titillation one can read in his source material. Unlike Eden, whose voyeuristic interest in the grotesque colors much of his work,<sup>65</sup> Rhys presents the giants’ animal skin clothing, tent-like homes, and rudimentary weapons in terms of the simplicity of their lifestyle and their links to other rustic giants of the ancient past, aligning the creatures more with the mountain giants of Welsh folklore than the monsters of the *mappae mundi*.

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example, has argued that Eden’s vacillation between pro- and anti-Spanish sentiments reflect the instability of Ibero-British political alliance, while Michael Householder has suggested that Eden’s portrayal of the Spanish is ambiguous enough to allow for multivalent readings. Claire Jowitt has even postulated that Eden’s descriptions of monsters and prodigious births offer cryptic critiques rooted in the rhetoric of the anti-Marian exiles. Most, however, agree that Eden’s work is overall more outwardly sympathetic toward the Spanish than other English travel literature of the period, even if the reasons for this sympathy remain up for debate. Although Rhys was also a Catholic (albeit one writing decades later with Elizabethan rather than Marian concerns), his Catholicism seemingly plays no role in his treatment of Magellan. See David Gwyn, “Richard Eden: Cosmographer and Alchemist,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15.1 (1984): 13-34; Hadfield, “Peter Martyr, Richard Eden, and the New World: Reading, Experience and Translation,” *Connotations* 5.1 (1995/96): 1-22; Householder, *ibid.*; Claire Jowitt, “‘Monsters and Strange Births’: The Politics of Richard Eden. A Response to Andrew Hadfield,” *Connotations* 6.1 (1996-97): 51-64; and John Parker, *Richard Eden: Advocate of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991).

<sup>65</sup> Jowitt, 52-53.

In virtually every instance, Rhys's translation sympathizes with the native giants over their European captors. At several points in the narrative, he strays from his source to present the events from the perspective of the giants rather than that of Magellan and his men. For example, his translation of the episode in which the giant recoils at his own reflection emphasizes the emotions felt by the giant as he sees himself for the first time in a mirror, describing his marvel at the new technology as *ryw dhiysmwyth dhisyndod bhredych ac obhn arnaw* "some instant unexpected fright and fear [coming] over him."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, when Magellan encounters his first giant, Rhys frames the experience from the perspective of the giant rather than the explorers, noting the shame the giant felt in the presence of European finery. He writes:

*A phan weles y cawr y lhywiawdr yn ei degwch dilhad a thlyssev a gwyhder, a bagad oi gedymdeithon, a'i gebheilhon, a'i weison yn ei gylch yn gadarn, ebh a sannawdh arnaw, ac a bhv bhrith ryw bhredych arnaw, ac a bhv rybhedh gantaw*

And when the giant saw the captain in his fine and excellent clothes and the host of his compatriots and companions and servants steadfastly surrounding him, he was astonished. The marks of a scoundrel were on him, and he was amazed.<sup>67</sup>

Although Eden notes that the giant gestured to heaven upon his initial meeting with the explorers, no attempt is made in either Eden or Pigafetta to address the giant's inner thoughts or motivations as Rhys does. Notably, in Rhys's version it is Magellan, not the giant, who is perceived as monstrous; here, the European men are treated as an aberration in the natural landscape, as their incongruous appearance both confuses and attracts the giant who more easily blends into the natural environment.

This sympathy towards the giants characterizes much of Rhys's translation, extending even into episodes that place them in direct opposition to the European explorers. When Magellan captures the giants by tricking them into wearing iron chains, Rhys introduces the terror the giants feel toward their inevitable enslavement into the narrative. He writes:

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<sup>66</sup> Grooms, 290.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 290.

*pan wybvant y gebhynnedigion bhod y gebhynnev yn rhyddhiogel ar ev coessev, wynt a dhechrevassant betrvssaw ac amgenv, ac obhni ev ceithiwaw. Eithr y lhywiawdr a rodhes gyssyr a hyder yndvnt gan erchi vdhvnt sebhylh yn lhonydh. Ac o'r diwedh, pan welsant y modh y daroedh ev twylhaw hwy a'e gwnevtvhr yn geith, wynt a bhrebhynt mal teirw ac a bhloedhynt yn gyndeiriawc.*

When the shackled ones realized that the shackles were too tightly fastened on their legs, they began to doubt and vacillate and fear their imprisonment. But the captain gave consolation and confidence to them by bidding them to stand in peace. And finally, when they saw the way they had been deceived and the way they were made slaves, they lowed like bulls and screamed furiously<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, Eden's account simply reads: "When they felte the shakels faste abowte theyr legges, they begunne to doubte."<sup>69</sup> As in the episode detailing the initial meeting between giants and the Europeans, Rhys humanizes the former by providing original details regarding the emotions of the giants that are not extant in his source material. These additions to the text encourage its readers to sympathize with the otherwise fearsome giants by instructing them to consider the cruelty of Magellan's actions as well as question the morality of enslavement. Although it would be an oversimplification to claim that Rhys ignores the more wondrous and frightful aspects of the giants' nature—he does, after all, compare their cries to the roaring of bulls and notes that they called out to their demon-god Setebos for aid—it is clear that his sympathies are not unambivalently aligned with the Western explorers of the tale.

On several occasions in the narrative, Rhys openly criticizes the actions of the conquistadors, accusing them of trickery, deceit, and other moral failings. As Theodore Cachey has noted, one of Pigafetta's goals in publishing his account was to rehabilitate the reputation of Magellan, who had been depicted as an abusive traitor in Peter Martyr's official chronicle of the circumnavigation.<sup>70</sup> In order to do so, Pigafetta depicts Magellan as a wondrous Christian knight who conquers the world not only for Spain, but also for his faith, a characterization that Eden

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 292-94.

<sup>69</sup> Eden, 219.

<sup>70</sup> Cachey, xxiii.

upholds in his own translation.<sup>71</sup> Rhys, on the other hand, scathingly refers to the mirrors, bells, and rosaries with which Magellan lures the giants as *teganau* and *pethach*, “trinkets” and “trifles”, and laments that the giants were willing to exchange their freedom for such worthless novelties. Of the giant John, who was christened and taught Spanish prayers, he states:

*Ac ebh a rodhes y lhywuawdr i'r cawr yma grys o liein, a phais o bhrethyn gwynn, a chap hebhyd, a chrib, a drych o wydwr i edrych ei lvn yndaw, yghhyd a bagad o bethev a theganev gyd a hynny: ac bhelhy yn llwythawc o'r pethach hynn ydh anbhones y lhywiawdr y cawr yma at ei gedymdeithon a'i gybheilion.*

And the captain gave this giant a linen shirt, a woolen tunic, and a cap as well as a comb, a glass mirror in which to see his face, as well as a host of objects and toys; and thus burdened by these trinkets, the captain sent this giant back to his companions and friends.<sup>72</sup>

In this passage, which has no correspondence in either Eden or Pigafetta, Rhys emphasizes the ways in which exposure to Western conventions leaves the native Patagonians *llwythog*, burdened or oppressed, by their own desire to conform to their captor's expectations. Magellan, by offering mirrors in which they recoil at their own image and clothes that highlight the insufficiencies of their native dress, teaches the giants to feel shame regarding their own appearance, a process which Rhys insinuates is the first step towards what he views as the captain's cruel plan to rob the Patagonians of their freedom.

Rhys's anti-Magellan sentiment is expressed most strongly in the aforementioned episode in which the conquistador tricks the giants into letting his men place irons on their legs. Pigafetta and Eden recount this event as an example of Magellan's cleverness and courage as a leader. In their version of the narrative, Magellan's capture of the giants is an undeniable act of bravery.

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<sup>71</sup> Eden's promotion of Magellan is even more remarkable when one considers the fact that Pigafetta's account was written in direct response to the negative representation of his captain in Peter Martyr's *De Orbo Novo Decades*, a text that served as the primary source for Eden's *The Decades of the Newe World*. Although the majority of *The Decades of the Newe World* is a literal translation of *De Orbo Novo Decades*, Eden tellingly chose to substitute Pigafetta's account for that of Martyr. It is possible that Eden simply valued Pigafetta's eye-witness account over the second-hand scholarship of Martyr, although the choice of Pigafetta's laudatory account of the Spanish explorer perhaps speaks to Eden's own uncertain relationship with the Marian court.

<sup>72</sup> Grooms, 292.



Rhys, on the other hand, presents this incident as emblematic of the wickedness of Magellan and his men. He writes:

*A'r lhywiawdr a erbynniawdh dhav or rhai hynn, a'r rhai a oedhynt ieighabh a phrydbherthabh o honvnt. Ac ebh ae dalliawdh wy drwy dwyllhodrys dhichellh a chybhrwyssedd yn y lhn hynn, nyd amgen: Trwy rodhi cylhylh, a gwelhevbhev, a drychev o wydr, a chylch, a phaderevev o rissial wydr, ac amledh o bhagad o annoethev a theganev babieidh erailh gyd a'r rhai hynny vdhvnt*

And the captain took two of them who were the youngest and most attractive. And he seized them through deceitful ruse and trickery in this way, namely: by giving knives and scissors and glass mirrors, and bells and rosaries of crystal and a multitude of trifles and toys and other infantile things to them.<sup>73</sup>

Rhys dismisses Magellan's gifts to the giants, calling him *annoethev a theganev babieidh*, "trifles and infantile toys," false marvels used to disorient the giants and strip them of their freedom *drwy dwyllhodrys ddichellh a chyfrwyssedd*, "through deceitful ruse and trickery."

Written only ten years after the failure of the Spanish Armada to invade Britain and concurrently with Britain and Spain's race to colonize the Americas, Rhys's history displays an expected amount of anti-Spanish bias, which inevitably influences his depiction of Magellan.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the text, Rhys criticizes Spanish claims to American territories, at one point asserting that Spanish expeditions to the New World are guided by the same demons who led the Anglo-Saxons to Britain centuries before.<sup>75</sup> This sort of anti-Spanish sentiment is certainly not unique to Rhys's account, nor is the scorn he heaps upon Magellan for his treatment of the Patagonian natives.<sup>76</sup> That a European writer would encourage his readers to identify with otherwise

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 292

<sup>74</sup> Compare Rhys's anti-Spanish sentiments to the anti-Spanish bias in both English and Welsh tales of Madoc discussed above.

<sup>75</sup> Peniarth 118, fol. 794.

<sup>76</sup> For example, see Sir Francis Drake's description of Patagonia, posthumously published in 1628, in which he accuses Spanish reports of exaggerating the size of the natives. He writes, "they are nothing so monstrous, or giantlike as they were reported; there being some English men, as tall, as the highest of any that we could see, but peradventure, the Spaniards did not thinke, that euer, any English man would come thither, to reprove them; and therevpon might presume the more boldly to lie" (28). Furthermore, he notes that if the Patagonians behave monstrously, their ill-treatment by Magellan and his men are to blame: "But this is certaine, that the Spanish cruelties there vsed, haue made them more monstrous, in minde and

monstrously depicted Amerindian people over European colonizers is not altogether unusual in travel literature of the period. For example, in his notes on Columbus's biography John Dee repeatedly criticizes Spanish treatment of the peoples of the Caribbean, whom he praises for their gentleness and compliance.<sup>77</sup> Anthony Padgen has described a phenomenon he has termed "the principle of attachment" in which European authors represent the Americas as a funhouse mirror version of their European homelands.<sup>78</sup> This process allowed for the domestication of exotic landscapes, an act that facilitated colonization by presenting it as a reunion of similar cultures. Similarly, the figure of the 'savage critic' appeared frequently throughout the works of Michel de Montaigne, Thomas Harriot, and even Richard Eden to rebuke Western colonizers for brutality that far superseded the perceived savagery of the Native Americans.<sup>79</sup> However, the giants of Rhys's translation do not appear to fall under this category. Instead, his interest in the inner life of the Patagonian giants echoes the similar treatment of the ancient giants of Britain that characterizes his history, as well as the general fascination with giants and mountain men that informs the literary and intellectual culture of sixteenth-century Wales more broadly. The tale of the Patagonians enabled Rhys to insert elements of the ancient British past into an American landscape and find kinship among their shared marvels and empathy at the loss of autonomy that befell both.

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manners, then they are in body; and more inhospitable, to deale with any strangers, that shall come hereafter. For the losse of their friends (the remembrance wherof is assigned and conueighed ouer from one generation to another, among their posteritie) breedeth an old grudge, which will not easily be forgotten" (28). Like Rhys, Drake's account achieves a certain level of sympathy for the giants whose lives have been disrupted by Western expansion. Unlike Rhys, however, Drake ultimately views these people as aberrations. Although he casts blame on the Spanish treatment of the natives, his own experience with them runs parallel to that of Magellan, as Drake describes the violent conflict that erupts between various Amerindian tribes and his English fleet. For Drake, the Patagonians must be civilized, but only through a softer English touch than the brutish Spanish can apply. Sir Francis Drake, *The World Encompassed* (London, 1628).

<sup>77</sup> Sherman, "John Dee's Columbian Encounter," 135.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 17-50.

<sup>79</sup> Hadfield, "Peter Martyr, Richard Eden, and the New World," 6-8.

I would argue that Rhys's sympathetic view of the giants cannot stem solely from a larger British anti-Spanish sentiment, which criticized Spanish colonization of Patagonia only insofar that it precluded the British from establishing their own strongholds there. Rhys's view of the Patagonians emerges not from a sense of British jingoism, but instead from a profoundly Welsh vision of history. Following the examples of Llwyd, Powel, and others before him, Rhys's fascination with American marvels stems not from enthusiastic support of the expansion of English imperial power; rather, his translation reveals a desire to demonstrate how the geographical and cultural outliers of Wales and Patagonia are connected by their shared history, language, and marvelous populations. Andrew Hadfield has described Eden's *The Decades of the Newe World* as celebrating the "break with the past" that accompanied the discovery of the Americas, an event he describes as "the crucial moment which defines the experience of modernity, enabling the development of a self-reflexive consciousness which does not have to refer back to previous authorities."<sup>80</sup> Rhys, on the other hand, is more concerned with the preservation of historic marvels found among the pages of medieval fables and histories, appealing to tales of the New World as extant evidence for the prehistoric giant figures dismissed by his English humanist counterparts.

This desire to connect ancient Welsh legend with modern exploration manifests itself in other sections of Rhys's history. Earlier in his treatise, he offers his own version of the Madoc legend that complements his tale of the Patagonians in such a way as to position both Patagonians and Mexicans as inheritors of Welsh marvel.<sup>81</sup> He reports that Madoc and his men ventured westward in ships

*lhe y canbhv lawer o bethev rhybhedh, ac yr aethant gyd ac ebh lawer o  
 genedloedh y Cymry, ac yno, gwedy ei ail gyrch, y trigiawdh ebh a'i  
 gedymdeithion ai gybheilhon, ac y tybhassant drwy hirdalm o amser yn genedl  
 dhirbhawr ei meint, ac y gorescynnasant wledydh aml ac ehalaeth, ac y bv o*

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>81</sup> NLW MS Peniarth 118, f. 750-752.

*honynt (medhant) lvaws o bhrenhinoedh, ac y gwnaethant orchwylion a gweithredoedh ardherchawc, o'r rhain y maent aml gobhion ac hystoriaev diyscribhen ynghobh a medhwl y cennedloedh hynny hyd y dydh hedhiw...A'r wlad honn a ymgybharbhw y Cymry nev'r Prydeinieid a hi cyn no dybhod idhi na Cholumbus nev Americus Vesputius, nac vn nac aralh o wyr yr Hyspaen*

where he saw many wondrous things. Many people of the Welsh nation went with him. And there, after his second expedition, he settled with his companions and his friends. Over a long period of time, they had grown into an exceedingly large people, and they had possessed lands far and wide. There was among them (so they say) a multitude of kings, and they performed excellent feats and deeds about which there are many memories and unwritten histories in the memories and minds of this people until today... The Welsh or Britons discovered this land before Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci came to it, or any other Spaniard.<sup>82</sup>

Rhys faults the Spanish not for reaching the Americas first, but rather for not acknowledging their expeditions had been predated by those of the Welsh centuries before. For Rhys, the Madoc legend does not speak to a larger British claim to American colonial territory; instead, it demonstrates a sense of historical Welsh achievement, noted in his emphasis that it was the *Cymry* who first populated the land, whose ancestors continue to live there today, and whose memories live on in stories of the natives.

According to the logic of Rhys's history, these ancestors necessarily include the giants of Patagonia. He claims that over time Madoc's descendants *tyfassant drwy hirdalm o amser yn genedl ddirfawr ei meint*. Literally, this statement translates as "they grew over a long period of time into a people exceedingly large in size." While this could be taken to mean that the population of the American Welsh grew through passing generations, one can also read that they literally grew to be physically enormous. Although this claim seems outlandish at first, it would certainly be consistent with Rhys's stated belief in his treatise that the greatest men in history often possessed gigantic proportions.<sup>83</sup> He numbers Arthur, William the Conqueror, Constantine the Great, and Francis I among men whose physical stature corresponded with their historical

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., f. 750-751.

<sup>83</sup> Rhys is not alone among his peers regarding his belief that the greatest men in history were literally giants. Daniel Woolf notes that "a prominent part of the long-standing theme of historical decline, challenged only sporadically in the Middle Ages by such visionaries as Joachim of Fiore, was the idea that mankind had *literally* declined in physical stature, longevity, and prowess." See Woolf, 56-57.

greatness. It is thus possible that he believed that the glory of Madoc reflected in the size of his descendants. He certainly argues that the language of Madoc shaped the indigenous languages of the Americas. He provides several linguistic examples to establish early Welsh contact with the continent such as his repetition of the story of the white-headed *pen gwyn*. He echoes David Powel's interest in the onomastic history of the Americas, particularly in his references to the island of Croeso where the Welsh explorers were welcomed into the New World as well as Cape Breton, an island he believes was named for its Brittonic founders. Although Rhys does not explicitly connect the giant descendants of Madoc to the giants of Patagonia, it can be gathered from his history that the Patagonian giants were long-lost descendants of Madoc who were speaking an altered form of Welsh when Magellan and his men disrupted their society. It is not a coincidence that the story of Patagonian giants directly precedes a long section concerning the Welsh giants of literature and folklore that forms the heart of Rhys's argument: for Rhys, they are inextricably connected.

By suggesting Welsh ancestral links for the Patagonian giants, Rhys is able to defend the veracity of the more marvelous elements of Welsh history from their contemporary detractors. The presence of giants in the Americas confirms the existence of giants throughout history, which in turn makes traditional Welsh stories about giant-slayers such as Brutus and Arthur, as well as the giant folklore of the Welsh countryside, seem less implausible. However, their appearance in Rhys's history is not just tangential evidence for the generic existence of giants. Instead, they are relics of a uniquely Welsh history in which giants and heroes roamed the landscape, and the Welsh single-handedly conquered the world. In the context of sixteenth-century Britain, where Welsh identity was finding itself quickly subsumed into a sense of Anglocentric Britishness with its own self-serving mythologies and preoccupations, this fantasy held a great deal of attraction. In the case of Siôn Dafydd Rhys's history, the giants of Patagonia served as a mirror not only reflecting the ancient British past, but also its own colonial future.

## CONCLUSION

In his discussion of Richard Eden's *The Decades of the Newe World*, Michael Householder notes the temptation among historians and literary critics of recent years to read early European-American interaction through the lens of a single postcolonial narrative that positions the European colonists as masters over dehumanized American colonials. He praises this scholarship for challenging much of the historical narrative of the creation of the modern Americas by attuning its readers to underlying contradictions and fractured perspectives characterizing much of sixteenth-century travel narrative. However, he criticizes the reductionism of some of this work, which he claims consolidates the many competing voices of a text into two groups: colonizer and colonized. Householder argues that this simplistic division "reduc[es] the rhetorical variety and richness of this body of literature to a homogenized white noise of imperial propaganda."<sup>84</sup> Although Householder is specifically discussing the complicated web of Catholic Anglo-Spanish affiliations that inform Eden's history, his point is especially relevant for understanding Welsh writing about the Americas during this time period. It is easy to read the tales of Madoc and impassioned pleas for the re-creation of a lost British Empire as just another facet of the colonizing impulse of early modern Europe, either supporting the claims of the Tudor crown to Transatlantic empire or performing a comically futile pastiche of imperial power.<sup>85</sup> Like the historical narratives that Householder claims force European-Amerindian encounters into a singular interpretive apparatus, these views read early modern Welsh American fantasies as a function of Wales's position as a weak appendage of an all-encompassing English culture.

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<sup>84</sup> Householder, 13.

<sup>85</sup> For example, in *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt mentions a few of the legends of pre-Columbian discovery of the Americas popular in various areas throughout Europe during the sixteenth century, including the Madoc legend. However, only the Welsh legend is described as "idle" and dismissed as a caricature of the "historical arguments" of more powerful nations whose claims to power could be taken more seriously. Greenblatt, 62-63.

Of course, it is paramount to understand Welsh histories and legends of colonization in relation to their English counterparts: after all, these Welsh tales owed great debt to the English travelogues and histories chronicling the exploration of the Americas, with many of these texts being direct translations from English material. However, we should not overestimate the influence of the English tradition on that of the Welsh. Equally important to these early stories of the Americas is the older Welsh tradition of conceptualizing the marvelous as a native phenomenon. By the end of the sixteenth century, these marvels were envisioned as parallels to the marvels of the rapidly expanding Far West rather than the Far East, reflecting the general westward expansion of the European geographical imagination. These trends manifested themselves most clearly in the legend of Madoc. Despite the general popularity of the legend throughout Britain and its prominent use in the treatises of English imperialists, the Madoc story can be traced to the works of the Welsh *litterati* immersed in the creation of a sixteenth-century Welsh vocabulary of wonder whose works incorporated the tale into expansive visions of Welsh histories that placed its human and geographical wonders at their forefronts. As the land of Prester John or the Syrian giants of pseudo-Galfridian lore had provided Welsh authors with the language to frame Wales as outside the influence of English political and cultural hegemony, so too did the stories of Madoc and the Welsh-speaking Indian giants supply them an outlet to explore the nature of colonization, their relationship to other colonized peoples, and their own particular role in the creation of British empire. In the face of Wales's absorption into a newly created imperial whole, these authors looked outward to the West and saw in it the mountains, giants, and language of their own land reflected back.

Underlying these tales was the knowledge that such marvel made the Welsh vulnerable to the fates of similarly exceptional lands whose wonders attracted foreign interlopers who wished to exploit them and claim them for themselves. If the loss of sovereignty silently looms over the Welsh American tales, it proclaims itself loudly in other literature of the period. In particular, humanist translators turned to medieval narratives of conquest and refashioned them into

cautionary imperialists narratives. In these translations, the lines between the Welsh and their wondrous counterparts are increasingly blurred, suggesting a shared fate in the face of imperial power. In the next chapter, I will examine the Welsh traditions surrounding two figures synonymous with empire and travel, Alexander the Great and John Mandeville. I will demonstrate the ways in which sixteenth-century translations of these materials reinterpret these prototypical heroes within the framework of the same concerns and anxieties influencing the tales of Madoc and the American giants.



**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**THE ANXIETY OF TRAVEL IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY WALES: THE CASES OF JOHN**  
**MANDEVILLE AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT**

As I have shown in previous chapters, Wales was experiencing a particularly medieval moment in the sixteenth century. Welsh, Latin, and English historiographical sources speak to a pressing need to reinvigorate and re-invent medieval literary and historical traditions, particularly the elements which modern readers increasingly considered implausible. These revisionist medievalist projects allowed Welsh humanists to promote a vision of their homeland that emphasized its geographical wonder and ties to a mythical past. Humanist endorsement of medieval historiography, in turn, validated claims of Welsh sovereignty in a post-Union milieu in which regional differences were often subsumed within an overarching new British mythos that either denied the veracity of legendary Welsh history or appropriated it for political propaganda. By attesting to the strange and ancient wonders found in the modern Welsh landscape, these scholars argued for the uniqueness of Wales and the value of its autonomy; the fundamental differences between Welsh and English geographies and histories ensured that Wales could not be completely consolidated into an Anglocentric Britain. This sixteenth-century phenomenon of rewriting medieval Welsh narrative traditions for contemporary political uses extended far beyond the heady intellectual debates of the humanists. A survey of Welsh manuscripts from this time demonstrates that medieval literature, both native and international, held the interest of Welsh poets and scribes.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how medieval *mirabilia* and pseudohistorical traditions found new life in the works of authors like Siôn Dafydd Rhys, Humphrey Llwyd, and David Powel. Other medieval texts were equally popular among early modern Welsh humanists. For example, Peniarth 118, the manuscript in which Rhys's

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<sup>1</sup> For a study of how a medieval text often found an extended life (both orally and in manuscript) throughout the modern period, see Sioned Davies, "O Gaer Llion i Benybenglog: Testun Llanstephan 58 o 'Iarlles y Ffynnon'" in *Cyfoeth y Testun*, Ed. Iestyn Daniel et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 326-348; and Morfydd Owen, "The Prose of the *Cywydd* Period" in *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1282-1550*, Vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Eds. A.O.H. Jarman, Gwilym Rees Hughes, and Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 322-37.

*apologia* for Welsh giant lore appears, contains a treasury of medieval prose materials, including copies of such tales as *Ystoria Bown de Hamptwn* and *Owain ac Luned* in the hands of such notable antiquarians as John Davies, Robert Vaughan, and, of course, Rhys himself.<sup>2</sup>

The early modern presence of medieval narrative can be partially explained by the conservatism of Welsh manuscript culture. Many of these texts would remain fixtures in the numerous Welsh manuscript compendia that continued to be produced as late as the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Yet the increased production of medieval tales during the late sixteenth century cannot adequately be explained as the actions of scribes indiscriminately copying the contents of the medieval manuscripts to which they had access. This period saw not only the continued transmission of medieval Welsh prose, but also the appearance of new translations of popular English and Latin tales. Several new translations of medieval material appear in late sixteenth-century manuscripts, some of which was translated into Welsh for the first time during this period.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to translators were tales of adventure and travel into Far Eastern lands. For example, NLW MS 13075B, a late sixteenth-century anthology with an emphasis on classical and religious narrative, features a version of *Ystori'r Llong Foel* as well as modern translations of *Owein*, *Purdan Padrig* ("St. Patrick's Purgatory"), and *Saith Doethion Ruvain*

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans, "Peniarth 118" in *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, Vol. II, pt.I (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898), 718-25.

<sup>3</sup> See Owen, "Prose," 314-19; and Graham C.G. Thomas, "From Manuscript to Print: I. Manuscript" in *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1282-1550*, 241-59. For more on the relationship between medieval texts and early modern antiquarians, see Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 287-99.

<sup>4</sup> For a study of sixteenth-century translations of medieval material, see Diana Luft, *Medieval Welsh Translation: The Case of Ymddiddan Selyf a Marcwlff* (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2004), 87-144. She argues for a reconsideration of sixteenth-century scribes as vital links between the medieval and modern literary traditions of Wales whose work reflects an engagement with the political and social concerns of the time. Of particular use is her extensive catalogue of medieval and early modern Welsh translations, which she divides by genre and source and denotes where they can be found in manuscript and in print. See Luft, 299-316.

(“The Seven Wise Men of Rome”).<sup>5</sup> This manuscript also marks the appearance of the earliest Welsh translations of selections from the *Alexandreis*, Walter of Chatillôn’s twelfth-century Latin opus concerning the life and deeds of Alexander the Great. These translations, given the titles *Ystory y Gwr Moel o Sythia* (“The Story of the Bald Man of Scythia”) and *Ystori Alestotlys yn kynghori Alexander* (“The Story of Aristotle Counseling Alexander”), form the basis of a late sixteenth-century Welsh tradition of Alexander the Great independent of medieval Welsh literature.<sup>6</sup> The characterization of the early modern Welsh Alexander has little in common with the medieval Alexander tradition in Wales, which emphasized his military strength and his moral fortitude; instead, the sixteenth-century *Alexandreis* translations paint a picture of a conqueror who cruelly and unjustly colonized all whom he encountered on his journey.

Alexander was not the sole medieval figure of travel and conquest that found a new audience in late Tudor Wales. The sixteenth-century Alexander tradition is also informed by his appearance in the two translations of the fourteenth-century *The Book of John Mandeville* that appeared in Welsh manuscripts in the last quarter of the century. References to John Mandeville, the fictional knight from St. Albans whose fantastical journey to the Far East consolidated competing strands of medieval geographical lore and inspired generations of explorers, appear throughout the works of the *beirdd yr uchelwyr*, who often rely upon the legendary traveler as poetical shorthand for adventure and sophistication. However, like Alexander, the literature surrounding this figure of popular imagination was not translated into Welsh until c.1580, at which point two independent translations of *The Book of John Mandeville* were composed: one, a faithful prose translation and the other, a verse rendering. Although substantial differences exist between the two texts, both are based on Thomas East’s 1568 printing of the Pynson version of

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<sup>5</sup> For available editions of these texts, see Roberts, “Ystori’r Llong Foel;” and Henry Lewis, “Modern Welsh Versions of the Seven Wise Men of Rome,” *Revue Celtique* 46 50-88.

<sup>6</sup> For editions, see Brynley Roberts, “Ystori y Gŵr Moel o Sythia,” *Studia Celtica* 18/19 (1983-4): 216-33; and R.T. Pritchard, “Aristotle’s Advice to Alexander: Welsh Version of an Alexander Passage,” *Journal of the National Library of Wales* 24 (1986): 295-308.

the text.<sup>7</sup> *The Book of John Mandeville*, like the *Alexandreis*, was derided throughout the early modern period by Protestant, English humanist circles as “popish miracles and fraudulent impositions.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Alexander and Mandeville experienced a certain vogue during the sixteenth century in Wales.

The late popularity of both figures can be partially explained by the increased general interest in *mirabilia* in Wales contemporaneous with the production of these translations. As I have argued in previous chapters, the rhetoric of the sixteenth-century debates regarding Welsh identity and sovereignty often drew upon the same sort of medieval iconography of wondrous creatures and landscapes that is plentiful in the tales concerning Mandeville and Alexander. A closer inspection of the translations suggests that interest in these medieval travelers is directly informed by the sixteenth-century discourse concerning the growing influence of the English on the Welsh public sphere. Just as humanists had appealed to Galfridian history or giant folklore in their defenses of Wales, early modern translators adapted medieval travel narrative to express anxieties concerning loss of sovereignty and independence.

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<sup>7</sup> For a history of this printing, see the introduction to Tamarah Kohanski, *The Book of John Mandeville: An Edition of the Pynson Text* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), xii-xix. The Welsh *Mandeville* has received little critical attention at the time of this writing, due to both the perceived lack of quality of the translation (in the case of the verse translation) and the poor quality of the manuscript (in the case of the prose). W.B. Davies edited the verse *Mandeville* in 1931, and Th.M. Chotzen wrote a brief introduction to the prose manuscript several years later, in which he correctly associated the manuscript with the East edition and catalogued its illustrations. He declined, however, to produce a full edition, noting *je tiens à avertir l'éditeur futur qu'il devra avoir des yeux de lynx pour déchiffrer correctement l'écriture effacée des premières pages* (“I must warn the future editor who will need to have eyes like a lynx in order to correctly decipher the effaced writing of the first pages”) (305). The Welsh prose *Mandeville* unfortunately remains unedited in BL MS Addl. 14921, although Rosemary Tzanaki suggests that she has begun work on an edition in her study of the transmission of Mandeville texts (16). For more on the Welsh *Mandeville*, see Davies, ed., “Siôn Mawndfil yn Gymraeg,” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 5.4 (1931): 287-327; Chotzen, “Deux Traductions Galloises,” *Études Celtiques* 2 (1937): 304-10; and Tzanaki, *Mandeville's medieval audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville (1371-1550)* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> See C.W.R.D. Moseley, “The Metamorphoses of Sir John Mandeville,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 4 (1974): 23-24; and Gruffudd Aled Williams, *Ymryson Edmwnd Prys a Wiliam Cynwal* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986), cxlv-cxlvii.

Whereas earlier English and continental versions of these tales often praise the titular heroes for their strength or their adventurous spirit, the Welsh *Mandeville* and *Alexandreis* critique them for their wanderlust and the disregard they show concerning indigenous people. The late Tudor era in Wales was marked by the progressive movement of the English into the Welsh landscape, language, and law, and these translations reflect the uncertainties towards border-crossing and travel that accompanied the blurring of geographical and political divisions that occurred during this period. As attitudes toward conquest and colonization shifted in Wales, so too did the Welsh reception of these emblematic figures of travel. In this chapter, I will closely examine the evolution of the characterizations of Alexander and Mandeville in medieval and early modern Welsh literature and demonstrate how the early modern Welsh accounts deviate from their medieval source materials to reinvent these traditions within the post-Union political context of Wales.

### THE MEDIEVAL WELSH ALEXANDER

When discussing the early modern translations of material concerning Alexander and Mandeville, it is important to remember that although these figures did not appear until relatively late in the Welsh prose tradition, the poetic record reveals a long-established tradition of apocryphal tales about the travelers dating back to the medieval period. Of the two explorers, Alexander was the more deeply entrenched in the Welsh poetic imagination. Marged Haycock has done extensive and invaluable work on the two poems concerning Alexander and his fantastic travels that appear in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin.<sup>9</sup> Haycock has shown how these poems, the first an acephalous fragment containing a history of Alexander's conquests and the second entitled *Anryuedodeu Allyxander* ("The Wonders of Alexander"), shed light on early Welsh knowledge of the legends surrounding the Macedonian emperor. These poems, which

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<sup>9</sup> See Haycock, "Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules," 7-38; and *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, 404-32. For an analysis of these poems within the larger insular Alexander tradition, see Hildegard L.C. Tristram, "More talk of Alexander," *Celtica* 21 (1990): 658-63.

draw upon classical sources concerning Alexander, highlight the emperor's military prowess, the ease with which he conquered, and the marvels he witnessed during his expansive journeys.<sup>10</sup> Both poems depict Alexander as the heroic, lordly figure familiar to readers of the medieval Alexander Romance. Although Haycock notes a strain of censure throughout the historical poem likely attributable to the critical view of Alexander found in Orosius, the Welsh poems portray the emperor in a generally positive light.<sup>11</sup>

The poem that appears first in the manuscript, that is the acephalous fragment, details the history of Alexander from the height of his military career until the time of his death.<sup>12</sup> In this poem, he is characterized as strong battle-leader whom none can overtake and who capably seizes land from his enemy to add to his ever-expanding empire. According to the poem:

*bu deu tec ar wlat gwledychyssit  
 bu haelhaf berthaf or ryanet  
 bu terwyn gwenwyn gwae ygywlat  
 ef torres ardar teir gweith yg kat  
 ac ef ny vyd corgwyd ywlat*

He reigned over twelve foreign realms./ He was the most generous and splendid man born./ He was a fierce slayer, woe upon his neighbor./ He defeated Darius three times in battle/ And there are not even shrubs left in his land. (ll. 2-6, translation Haycock)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Haycock argues that the depiction of Alexander in these poems, although not a direct translation of any primary source, likely derives from Orosius's *Historia Adversum Paganos* and a tenth-century Latinization of Pseudo-Callisthenes, entitled *Historia de Preliis*, which are dated significantly earlier than the *Alexandreis* ("Some Talk," 18-21). Although each of these texts draws upon a shared Alexander narrative, they present unique visions of the conqueror, emphasizing different aspects of his personality and story, often for didactic purposes. It is important to note that the depiction of Alexander was not static; tales concerning the emperor developed significantly Christian overtones in many texts in the later Middle Ages. For more on the history of the uses of Alexander in Western medieval literature, see Gerrit Bunt, *Alexander the Great in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Egbert Forsten: Groningen, 1994); and George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

<sup>11</sup> Haycock, "Some Talk," 14-15; Tristram, 663.

<sup>12</sup> It should be stressed that this poem is fragmentary, and it is unknown what aspects of Alexander's life the beginning lines of the poem described.

<sup>13</sup> For *hael*, I have replaced Haycock's "prodigal" with "generous," as I feel that this definition more closely fits with the presentation of Alexander in this poem. Furthermore, I would argue that this definition better reflects other uses of *hael* prominent throughout Welsh praise poetry.

Although this passage hints at Alexander's capacity for cruelty in its description of his ability to lay waste to the land of his enemy, the poet conveys a general sense of awe in the face of the sheer breadth of power that the emperor commands. Later in the poem, the poet notes the ferocity with which the emperor and his men ravaged the Amazons (ll. 22-26) and even goes so far as to suggest that Alexander's death at the hands of a treacherous servant was deserved (ll. 35-36);<sup>14</sup> however, the cruelties Alexander performs in the name of empire do not detract from the overall positive impression of the leader created by the poet. Like many leaders praised in early insular panegyric, Alexander is depicted according to the values of heroic leadership. While he may bring woe upon his enemies, he remains *haelhaf* ("the most generous") and *berthaf* ("most splendid") to his own men. Like other leaders praised in the poetry of the Book of Taliesin, such as Urien Rhedeg and his son Owein ap Urien, Alexander's strength and virtue lie partially in his ability to devastate foreign lands and peoples.<sup>15</sup>

In this poetry, Alexander functions not merely as a symbol of brute military force. The poet equally praises him for his worldliness and the extent to which he has traversed the globe. The mid-section of the poem details the extent to which Alexander traveled and catalogues the real and imagined lands that he has visited:

*myued bed berthrwyd or adwyndawt  
hael Alexander ae kymeth yna.  
gwlat syr asiryoel agwlat syria  
agwlat dinifrd. Agwlat dinistra.  
gwlat pers amers agwlat ykanna.  
Ac ynyssed pleth aphletheppa.  
Achiwdawt babilon Ac agascia mawr  
agwlat galldarus bychan y da.*

<sup>14</sup> While the poet criticizes the Amazons for their violation of traditional gender roles, claiming they lack modesty, he also describes them as *wraged gordynt* ("proud women"). Marged Haycock reads *gordynt* as *gorfynt*. Although *gorfynt* has certain negative connotations, including "jealous" and "ambitious," it can also connote nobility (s.v. *gorfynt*, *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*). The conflicting connotations of the word perhaps speak to the poet's own begrudging sympathy towards the Amazons at the time of their rape.

<sup>15</sup> See A.T.E. Matonis, "Traditions of Panegyric in Welsh Poetry: The Heroic and the Chivalric," *Speculum* 53.4 (1978): 667-68.

The wealth of the world, magnificent splendor/ Generous Alexander then  
conquered them:/ The land of Syr and Siryoel and the land of Syria/ And the land  
of Dinifdra and the land of Dinitra,/ The realm of Persia and Mers and the land of  
Canna,/ And the islands of Pleth and Pletheppa,/ And the city of Babylon, and  
Asia,/ And the land of Galldarus, paltry its wealth. (ll. 13-20, translation  
Haycock)

Haycock has noted that the list bears a striking resemblance to the list of places the porter has visited in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, suggesting that the rhyming and alliterative place names evoke the foreign and exotic to emphasize Alexander's placement within the legends of Eastern antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, I would suggest, the alliterative qualities of the list, as well as the repetition of *gwlat* or *agwlat*, create a soporific effect that overwhelms the reader and allows him or her to be overtaken by the immensity of Alexander's territory. The reader is meant not only to stand in awe before Alexander's martial strength, but also to marvel at the breadth of his travels. The poem suggests that his influence extends to unheard of Eastern lands of whose treasures a medieval Welsh audience could merely dream.

The second Alexander poem in the Book of Taliesin, given the title "The Marvels of Alexander," further embellishes the account of Alexander's travels, extending them beyond the realms of the earth into fabulous submarine and celestial spaces. The poem describes Alexander as traveling under the sea *y geissaw keluydyt* ("to seek learning/art") (l. 10, translation Haycock) where he meets a monstrous fish (ll. 18-19). In addition to this marvel, he travels into the sky *rwg deu grifft* "between two griffins" (l. 14) where he views the world in its entirety. In this section, his flight parallels the wars he has waged, as he aerially conquers the world through sight as he has done through his military campaigns on the ground. As the poet recounts these marvels, he also elegizes Alexander and laments that his exploits now exist only in legend. Whereas the preceding fragmentary poem hints at the moral ambiguity of his conquests, "The Marvels of Alexander" presents an unequivocally favorable portrait of the leader. In apocalyptic language that resembles the famous lament of Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the

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<sup>16</sup> "Some Talk," 12-13. See also the discussion of *Culhwch ac Olwen* in Chapter One of this dissertation.



poet states of Alexander: *Ryfedaf na chiawr/ adef nef ylawr/ odyfot rwyf gawr/ Alexander mawr* (“I am astonished that Heaven’s dwelling/ does not fall to earth/ on account of the death of the battle-leader/ Alexander the great”) (ll. 1-4, translation Haycock).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, while the preceding poem highlights the inauspicious nature of Alexander’s death (being poisoned by a treacherous servant), “The Marvels of Alexander” omits this element of the narrative; instead, it concludes by praising Alexander’s conquests and expressing hope that the emperor’s place in heaven is assured: *A eidunwys yn y vryt./ agafas or byt./ Aheuyt oe diwed/ gan duw trugared* (“That which he desired in his heart he won of the world; and also, by his death, mercy from God”) (ll. 20-24, translation Haycock). Despite this difference, both poems claim that Alexander’s greatness stems from his ability to survey the land and take from it what he desires; although the fragmentary Alexander poem acknowledges that this approach ensures casualties, both it and “The Marvels of Alexander” suggest that these casualties are overshadowed by the glory of conquest.

Haycock has argued that aside from these direct, biographical poems, the figure of Alexander also appears throughout the corpus of Welsh eulogy as “bardic short-hand to convey worthy qualities, as so often is the case in later panegyrics, which are peopled with parish-pump world conquerors, ‘second Alexanders’.”<sup>18</sup> Petty chieftains could imagine themselves subjugating their rivals just as Alexander once did, and praise poets could indulge this colonizing fantasy through their allusive use of the Alexander Romance. In the works of the *beirdd y tywysogion*, poets could rely upon a brief allusion to Alexander as a device to heighten their poetic subjects’

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<sup>17</sup> Compare to Gruffudd ap yr Ynad Coch’s imagery and use of -aw- alliteration in his *marwnad* for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last independent Prince of Wales whose death in 1282 marked the end of autonomous Welsh rule: *Pony welwch chwi hynt y gwynt ar glaw?/ Pony welwch chwi’r drei yn ymdaraw?/ Pony welwch chwi’r mor yn merwinaw yr tir?/ Pony welwch chwi’r gwir yn ymgyweiaw?/ Pony welwch chwi’r heul yn hwylaw’r awyr?/ Pony welwch chwi’r syr wedy’r syrthiaw?* (“Can you not see the way of the wind and the rain?/ Can you not see the oak trees clashing against each other?/ Can you not see the sea consuming the land?/ Can you not see the true struggling?/ Can you not see the sun hurtling through the sky?/ Can you not see that the stars have fallen?”).

<sup>18</sup> “Some Talk,” 7.

perceived martial strength. For example, in a panegyric dedicated to Rhys ap Gruffudd, Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (fl. 1155-1200) refers to the Welsh leader as *Kynif6r kynnif ni diouer/ Kynnifyad kynnetyf Alexander/ Terynas dinas, dyn a gymer/ Ymera6dyr, lly6ya6dyr, llyw amniuer* (“a leader who does not reject battle,/ a fighter with the nature of Alexander/ a defender of the land, a welcoming man/ emperor, leader, ruler of a great army”) (ll. 29-32).<sup>19</sup> Many later poets followed this pattern, using Alexander as a template onto which they could build the extraordinary character of their patrons. In a poem attributed to the early fifteenth-century poet Hywel Swrdwal (fl. 1430-1475), Saint Curig is described as having *holl feddiant Alecsander* (“all the power of Alexander”) (l. 43).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Dafydd Nanmor (fl. 1450-1480) compares a young Henry Tudor to both a majestic eagle and a second Alexander: *A’i ddwy asgell a ddisgyn/ [Tros] y môr a’r [tir], os myn. Alexsander val eryr/ Bu yn y gwynt vwch ben gwŷr* (“With his two wings he alights/ over the sea and the land, if he desires./ Alexander, like an eagle,/ soared in the wind above all other men”) (ll. 55-58).<sup>21</sup> Alexander’s strength was not the only aspect poets drew upon to praise their patrons. Lewys Morgannwg (fl. 1520-1565) commends the education William, Lord Herbert of Pembroke received at the hands of his uncle, which he suggests recalls the tutelage Alexander experienced under Aristotle.<sup>22</sup> He employs similar imagery in his praise of William’s son, Edward, Lord Herbert, whom he describes as *mab unfaeth, gwinfaeth gwynfawr/ Â maeth Alecsander Mawr* (“an exceptionally reared boy, honorable and greatly beloved/ with the breeding of Alexander the Great”) (ll. 15-16). In each of these examples, Alexander appears as a

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<sup>19</sup> Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, “Arwyrain yr Arglwydd Rhys, Cynddelw a’i cant” in *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr*, Vol. II, eds. Nerys Ann Jones and Ann Parry Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 165-66.

<sup>20</sup> Hywel Swrdwal, “I Gurig Sant” in *Gwaith Hywel Swrdwal a’i Deulu*, Ed. Dylan Foster Evans (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2000), 76-77.

<sup>21</sup> Dafydd Nanmor, “I Harri Tudur, Iarll Richmwn” in *The Poetical Works of Dafydd Nanmor*, Ed. Thomas Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1923), 43-45.

<sup>22</sup> Lewys Morgannwg, “Moliant William, Arglwydd Herbert” in *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg*, Vol. 1, Ed. A. Cynfael Lake (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2004), 176-78.

generic stock figure associated with strength or refinement who conveys the power, be it political, militaristic, or cultural, that the poet wishes to impart upon his subject.

The figure of Alexander frequently appears in Welsh elegy in a similar fashion. Often, Alexander features in bardic lists numbering the great men of history and legend who died tragically young; poets allude to such deaths to heighten both the importance of the poem's subject as well as the sorrow at his passing. In a *marwnad* for Gwilym ap Gruffudd of Penrhyn, Rhys Goch Eryri (fl. 1385-1448) laments: *Gwae fi na welwn i neb,/ Nawnerth Ector, un wyneb/ Â Gwilym...Alecsander mawr Môn* ("woe is me that I will never [again] see anyone/ nine times the strength of Hector, with the same face/ as Gwilym...Alexander the Great of Anglesey") (ll.89-96).<sup>23</sup> In his *marwnad* for three brothers, William, Siôn, and Trahaearn Morgan, who succumbed to the plague in the late fourteenth century, Gruffudd ap Maredudd (fl. 1352-1382) similarly identifies each brother with a famous classical warrior who lived only briefly. He writes:

*Marw un oes, mawr wae'i fam  
Â moes Troelus, Meistr Wiliam.  
Sefyw'r ail dros farwolaeth  
Siôn draw; Alecsander aeth.  
Diwedd un, ail Dydd y Farn,  
Ector ieuanc, Trahaearn.*

An entire generation died, great was the woe of his mother/ Master William had the morals of Troilus./ This is the second one: because of death/ Siôn is far away; Alexander passed./ The last one, a second Judgment Day,/ a young Hector, Trahaearn. (ll. 7-12)<sup>24</sup>

In a *marwnad* for Tudur Fychan ap Goronwy, Gruffudd ap Maredudd laments that Tudur has *dioddeftranc un tebyg i Alecsander* ("suffered the same death as Alexander") (l. 132); here the

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<sup>23</sup> Rhys Goch Eryri, "Marwnad Gwilym ap Gruffudd o'r Penrhyn" in *Gwaith Rhys Goch Eryri*, Ed. Dylan Foster Thomas (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2007), 55-57. Rhys alludes to Alexander in two other poems that, while not *marwnadau*, lament the loss of a certain way of life in Wales and encourage its current leaders to reinvigorate the land and the people through emulation of heroes such as Alexander. In the above volume, see "Gyrru'r ddraig goch at Syr Wiliam ap Tomas o Raglen" ("Driving the Red Dragon towards Sir Wiliam ap Tomas of Rhaglen"), 93-95; and "Cywydd yn galw am adfer Gwynedd" ("Cywydd Calling for the Restoration of Gwynedd"), 111-113.

<sup>24</sup> Gruffudd ap Maredudd, "Marwnad tri brawd: Wiliam, Siôn, a Trahaearn Morgan" in *Gwaith Gruffudd ap Maredudd*, Vol. 1, Ed. Barry J. Lewis (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2003), 374-75.

“same death as Alexander” likely refers to a fall from great power rather than Alexander’s literal death by poisoning. Again, a reference to Alexander heightens the emotion of the poem and indicates the enormity of loss. The specific details of the Alexander legend play little part in this genre of poetry.

This is not to suggest that the poets did not experiment with the figure of Alexander in their poetry or explore the various shades of meaning they could extract from the Alexander legend. In fact, a single poet could draw upon different aspects of the character to suit the tone and purpose of different poems. It is not surprising that given his presence in *marwnadau*, Alexander often appears in poetry expressing *ubi sunt* motifs, i.e. works that lament the ephemeral nature of earthly life. Alexander’s fall from power and eventual murder embody the transience of all worldly power and possessions. In one eulogy, Cynddelw composes a long list of powerful men, including such heroes as Arthur, Bendigeidfran, and Hercules, who, despite their strength, met the same universal fate that he too faces. Included among this host is Alexander, described as *byd lywadur* (“ruler of the world”) (ll. 77-78).<sup>25</sup> A late fifteenth-century poem by Sir Dafydd Trefor, given the title “I ddangos fyrred oes dyn” (“To show the shortness of the life of man”), even more clearly demonstrates the ease with which Alexander was incorporated into Welsh *ubi sunt* (or here, *pa le mae*) poetry. In this work, Trefor enumerates legendary and historical figures whose earthly glory could not rescue them from death:

*Mae Samson golon y gwŷr  
Nerthog? Pa le mae Arthur?  
Mae Gwalchmai, ni ddaliai ddig,  
Gwrol? Mae Gei o Warwig?  
Mae Siarlas o’r maes eurlawr?  
Neu mae Alecsander Mawr?*

[Where] is Samson, strong column/ of men? Where is Arthur?/ [Where] is  
Gwalchmai, the virtuous one [who] would not stay angry?/ Where is Guy of

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<sup>25</sup> Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, “Canu i Dduw” in Jones and Owen, 309-12.

Warwick?/ [Where] is Charlemagne of the golden field?/ And [where] is  
Alexander the Great? (ll. 11-16)<sup>26</sup>

Great men such as Alexander might possess the ability to conquer the world and alter the course of history; however, for Dafydd Trefor and the other poets who meditated on the impermanence of worldly honor, the glory of these men only emphasizes their evanescence. Alexander's fate reminds the reader that no matter the geographical and political expanse of one's influence, all men will fall prey to the hands of time.

Although the Alexander legend provided Welsh bards with material suitable for either praising or lamenting political figures, late medieval poets more concerned with domestic topics could also call upon the emperor when discussing romance and lost love. For example, in a *cywydd llateiaeth* in which he beseeches his friend Llywelyn ap Gutun to deliver a love message to Gwerful Mechain (fl. 1462-1500) on his behalf, Dafydd Llwyd (fl. 1420-1500) compares himself to Fra Odoric of Pordenone (Brawd Odrig in Welsh), the Italian monk whose famous journey to Tibet found a popular audience throughout Europe and inspired numerous travel narratives during the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>27</sup> In his poem, Dafydd likens Gwerful's body to a foreign and obscure land and compares his romantic overtures to Odoric's expedition into the unmapped territory of Central Asia.<sup>28</sup> In response, Gwerful composed a *cywydd* criticizing Dafydd for sending a messenger instead of stating his amorous intentions directly. She instructs her would-be suitor to express his love for her less like the monastic Odoric and more like another famous traveler, Alexander the Great:

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<sup>26</sup> Syr Dafydd Trefor, "I ddangos fyrred oes dyn" in *Gwaith Syr Dafydd Trefor*, Ed. Rhiannon Ifans (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2005), 84-86.

<sup>27</sup> The travels of Fra Odoric were immensely popular during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and Odoric's itinerary was a primary source for many stories about the Far East that appear in *The Book of John Mandeville*. It first appeared in Welsh in the late fifteenth century as *Ffordd y Brawd Odrig* (*Path of the Brother Odoric*); the translation is contemporaneous with the poetic exchange that occurred between Gwerful Mechain and Dafydd Llwyd. See Williams, *Ffordd y Brawd Odrig*, xi-xxix.

<sup>28</sup> Dafydd Llwyd, "Cywydd Llateiaeth i Werful Mechain ac i yrru Llywelyn ap Gutun ati yn llatai" in *Gwaith Gwerful Mechain ac Eraill*, Ed. Nerys Ann Howells (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2001), 84-85.

*Alecsander a'i werin  
Aeth ar draws i weithio'r drin,  
I ymwybod rhag bod bâr  
Mawr duedd môr a daear:  
Caru fel y cwnwerwr*

Alexander and his men/ went away to make battle,/ and remained vigilant  
because of his lust/ for the great stretch of the land and the sea:/ Love like the  
conqueror. (ll. 63-67)<sup>29</sup>

In this passage, Gwerful presents Alexander as a metaphorical conqueror in the battle between the sexes. Rather than indirectly stating his desires, Gwerful encourages Dafydd to behave as Alexander, forcefully taking what he wants, confirming his masculinity and thus securing his status as a suitable lover. Whereas Odoric passively observed the people of the East, leaving them with only his memories, Alexander made the same unknown lands his own.

Although Gwerful Mechain depicts Alexander as the ultimate virile lover, other Welsh poets, such as Ieuan Dyfi and Lewys Morgannwg, adapted elements of the Alexander tradition to present him as an example of a betrayed lover, one whose loyalty blinded him to the machinations of those who plotted his destruction. In his complaint to Anni Goch, Ieuan Dyfi (fl. 1461-1500) includes Alexander in his list of archetypal figures destroyed by treacherous women, comparing him to Samson, Jason, and the victims of Helen of Troy among others.<sup>30</sup> Lewys Morgannwg expands upon this tradition in his poem warning Henry VIII against his marriage to Anne Boleyn as well as the advice he has been receiving from his English counselors regarding

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<sup>29</sup> Gwerful Mechain, "I Lywelyn ap Gutun," in *Ibid.*, 92-93. Gwerful Mechain's knowledge of the Alexander legend as well as the contemporaneously translated itinerary of Odoric speaks both to the bardic educational interest in continental and English literature as well as the close relationship between poetry and translated prose during this period. For more on Gwerful's education, see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "More Written about than Writing: Welsh Women and the Written Word" in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, Ed. Huw Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 160-63.

<sup>30</sup> Ieuan Dyfi, "I Anni Goch" in *Gwaith Gwerful Mechain*, 65-67. Like Dafydd Llwyd's love message discussed above, this poem also received a response from Gwerful Mechain, who composed a *cywydd* defending womankind against Ieuan Dyfi's charges and listing virtuous women as a counterpoint to the women mentioned in Ieuan's poem. For more on the Welsh tradition of *querelle des femmes*, see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "The 'Querelle des Femmes': A Continuing Tradition in Welsh Women's Literature" in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, Eds. Jocelyn Wogan Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 101-14; Marged Haycock, "Merched Drwg a Merched Da: Ieuan Dyfi v. Gwerful Mechain," *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 16 (1990): 97-110; and Dafydd Johnston, *Llên yr Uchelwyr: Hanes Beirniadol Llenyddiaeth Cymraeg 1300-1525* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 338-40.

such matters of state. He alludes to Alexander's death by poisoning, suggesting that his new wife and his English court are metaphorically poisoning the king's mind with their treacherous counsel. He compares Boleyn to:

*Morwyn a rôl'r gwenwyn gynt.  
Er rhoi gwen, anrheg unawr,  
I'r mab Alecsander Mawr,  
Â diod win wedy'i dwyn  
E'i llanwoedd oll o wenwyn.*

A woman who poisoned long ago./ Although presenting herself as fair, the gift of one hour,/ to the young Alexander the Great,/ she brought a drink of wine/ and filled it all with poison. (ll. 15-20)<sup>31</sup>

The solution to such a problem is clear to the poet: Henry should consider Alexander's fate and surround himself with trustworthy (and preferably Welsh) advisors:

*Cymer i'th gwrt Cymry i'th gylch.  
Nid âi wenwyn am d'einioes  
Neu frad twyll. Ni fyrheid d'oes  
Ein holl brud a'n llyfrau aeth:*

Take to your court Welshmen to surround you./ Poison will not enter your life/ nor will dark treachery. Your life will not be shortened./ All our history and our books have come to pass. (ll. 39-41)

Later in the poem, he compares Henry to Cadwaladr as well as the *oen a ddaroganwyd* ("the lamb that was prophesied"), hearkening back to the rhetoric of the *mab darogan* that the king's father, Henry Tudor, had employed to gain Welsh support for his reign and that continued to be promoted in the Welsh political and historiographical debates of the sixteenth century. Here, Lewys Morgannwg reminds the king of this history in order to convince him to promote his presumed Welsh kinsmen over treacherous Englishmen; for Lewys, the Tudor present was inextricably tied to the Welsh past (*ein brud a'n llyfrau ni*), and thus only the Welsh could be entrusted with the future of the realm. By entangling this Welsh legendary history with the history

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<sup>31</sup> Lewys Morgannwg, "I Harri'r Wythfed am iddo briodi Ann Bwlen" in *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg*, Vol. II, Ed. A. Cynfael Lake (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2004), 478-479.

of Alexander, the poet alludes to the consequences of ignoring such advice: loss of empire, loss of status, and even loss of life.

In other poems addressed to Henry VIII, Lewys Morgannwg further compares the king to Alexander, extolling both men's military virtues and their ability to conquer all those whom they encounter. In one panegyric, the poet claims that the land willingly gives itself up to Henry, as it did before to Alexander:

*Ym meddiant Alecsander  
Ymroes oll y môr a'r sêr.  
Ymroed hwnt y môr i ti;/  
Mae'r tir yn ymroi yt, Harri*

All the seas and the stars/ surrendered to the strength of Alexander./ The sea beyond is yielded to you;/ The land gives itself to you, Henry. (ll. 81-84)<sup>32</sup>

In his *marwnad* dedicated to the king, he compares Henry's death to the falls of Alexander, Hercules, and Arthur.<sup>33</sup> Even in poems in which the poet does not directly compare the king to Alexander, Lewys praises Henry's ability to subjugate others and expand his kingdom. Many descriptions of Henry hearken back to descriptions of Alexander found throughout Welsh literature. For example, in an *awdl* praising the king, he proclaims: *Bo dy enw wellwell! Y byd a enillaist!* ("May your name be [known] better and better! You won the world!") (l. 73).<sup>34</sup> He declares Henry *brenin gorllewin*, that is "king of the West," as opposed to Alexander's position as emperor of the East.

In each of these examples, it is clear that although the characterization of Alexander could vary for the Welsh panegyrists depending on the genre of poetry they were composing, he is uniformly presented in a positive manner. This overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Alexander in late medieval Wales is unique, standing in stark contrast to contemporaneous English and Continental representations. David Williams has shown that although the portrait of Alexander is

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<sup>32</sup> Lewys Morgannwg, "Moliant Harri'r Wythfed" in *Ibid.*, 485-87.

<sup>33</sup> Lewys Morgannwg, "Awdl Farwnad Harri'r Wythfed" in *Ibid.*, 491-93.

<sup>34</sup> Lewys Morgannwg, "Awdl Foliant i Harri'r Wythfed" in *Ibid.*, 481-83.



primarily positive in the late medieval English tradition, depictions of the emperor can be highly ambivalent: he is simultaneously the epitome of generosity and cupidity, wisdom and injustice, piety and sinfulness.<sup>35</sup> Although Welsh bards may occasionally allude to the darkness and violence lurking at the corners of the Alexander legend, they show little interest in exploring the polyvalent and often contradictory aspects of Alexander's actions and persona. For the medieval poets, the figure of Alexander proved to be useful shorthand to convey their patron's strength, meditate on the inevitability of death, or imagine empire.

### THE MEDIEVAL WELSH MANDEVILLE

Although not nearly as prominent in Welsh bardic poetry as Alexander, the figure of John Mandeville also played an important role in the language of travel and conquest of medieval Welsh poetry. Despite the fact that the first Welsh translation of *The Book of John Mandeville* did not appear until the late sixteenth century, approximately two hundred years after it appeared in its earliest Anglo-Norman form, I have found strong evidence that the work had a readership in Wales in the early fifteenth century. The tale, which relies upon such sources as the itinerary of Odoric of Pordenone, the Alexander tradition, and Marco Polo's journal, relates the pilgrimage of a fictional English knight to the Far East, where he meets a host of strange and interesting beings. The work was extraordinarily popular: over three hundred manuscripts in at least twelve languages are extant from the late middle ages, and it continued to be adapted into popular English verse even after the work fell out of favor with intellectual circles by the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Like the Alexander legend, bardic usage of Mandeville's travels precedes the work's earliest Welsh translations by over a century. The numerous poetic references to Mandeville in

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<sup>35</sup> David Williams, "Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature anglaise médiévale: De l'ambivalence et la polyvalence" in *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales*, Eds. Laurence Harf-Lancner, Clare Kappler, and François Suard (Nanterre: University of Paris X, 1999), 355-65.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the reception of *The Book of John Mandeville*, see Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*; and C.W.R.D. Moseley, "The availability of Mandeville's travels in England, 1356-1750," *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 30.2 (1975): 125-133.

Welsh, particularly references to the book as an important bardic educational tool, hold potentially profound implications for the multilingual nature of bardic training in medieval and early modern Wales. The prevalence of allusions to both *The Book of John Mandeville* and the Alexander Romance in Welsh poetry suggests that the poets were either reading or orally transmitting Latin and English language materials and incorporating them into traditional Welsh bardic lore.<sup>37</sup>

By the mid-fifteenth century, the figure of Mandeville had joined in the ranks of Arthur, Owain, Taliesin, and Alexander as a stock figure that poets could rely upon to succinctly imbue their poetic subjects with certain desirable personality traits. To the late medieval bards, Mandeville and his exotic travels to the Far East represented a worldliness and sophistication they could impart to their patrons and, indeed, themselves for being familiar with the English work. For example, Siôn ap Hywel (fl. 1490-1532) praises Ithel ap Gruffudd, claiming that his patron *myned fal hynt Mawndfil hen* (“traveled the same journey as old Mandeville”) (l. 6).<sup>38</sup> Guto'r Glyn (fl. 1412-1493) also frames Sieffrai Cyffin’s travels to France, Greece, and Africa in terms of the adventures of famous explorers:

*Iason ab Eson y bu.  
Treiglaw, rhodiaw a rhedeg,  
Tebyg i'r Brawd Odrig deg.  
Mynnu chwarteru tiroedd,  
Myned o flaen Mawndfil oedd.*

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<sup>37</sup> W.B. Davies has suggested that some authors who refer to Mandeville, in particular Wiliam Cynwal, reportedly could not read English, which would indicate that some poets were encountering the work either orally or in a now-lost Welsh translation. I feel that the latter is unlikely due to the fact that in the late sixteenth-century *ymryson* between Wiliam Cynwal and Edmwnd Prys, Prys refers to the work as being in print, which would simply not have been the case for a Welsh translation at the time. Any reference to a print *Mandeville* in Wales at this time would have to refer to an English copy, and likely Thomas East’s edition given its prominence as a source for both sixteenth-century translations of the text. Thomas Jones concurs, stating that the author of the Welsh *Mandeville*, Richard ap John o Scorlegan, worked from printed English sources, rather than a lost Welsh original. For more see, Davies, “Siôn Mawndfil,” 290-91; and Thomas Jones, “Copiau o ‘Frut y Tywysogion,’” *The National Library of Wales Journal* 5.3 (1947-48): 201.

<sup>38</sup> Siôn ap Hywel, “Moliant Ithel ap Gruffudd” in *Gwaith Siôn ap Hywel ap Llywelyn Fychan*, Ed. A. Cynfael Lake (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 1999), 31-33.

[He was] Jason son of Aeson./ Wandering, roaming, and traveling/ The same as  
fair Friar Odoric./ Desiring to quarter the world,/ Going as Mandeville went  
before. (ll. 30-34)<sup>39</sup>

Just as a reference to Alexander could highlight the military strength of a patron, a reference to Mandeville highlighted the patron's place within an ever-expanding world. Regarding the poet's increasing use of the figure in the praise poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, D.J. Bowen has suggested that *tebyg fod poblogrwydd yr hanesion am Syr Siôn Mawndfil yn y cyfnod hwn yn adlewyrchu'r diddordeb mewn teithio ac ehangu gornelion* ("it's likely that the popularity of the stories concerning Sir John Mandeville in this period reflects an interest in travel and expanding horizons").<sup>40</sup> As I have shown in Chapter Four of this dissertation, Welsh humanist authors were influenced by tales of exploration and colonization of the Americas during this period and incorporated elements of these stories into their own works. It is only fitting that Welsh praise poets would similarly wish to situate their patrons as players within this new political reality through emphasizing their travels.

Lewys Glyn Cothi's (fl. 1420-1490) praise poem to Richard Turberville encapsulates this desire to connect patrons to the new age of travel. Throughout the poem, he enumerates the treasures Richard has amassed from his journeys, which include Italian wines, Portuguese ships, and beryl stones. He states that although Richard lives in Glamorganshire, he has managed to collect wonders from three-fourths of the world. He claims:

*Pe rhodiwn i bob rhyd wen, neu bil,  
A'r divandvor a rodiai Vandvil  
Ni chawn ddyn o Leyn hyd yn Nghaer Lil,  
Onid Risiart o natur assil  
Bwa Yw Oesawg, a llavn Basil,  
A byw yw Risiart val coed Brasil*

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<sup>39</sup> Guto'r Glyn, "I Sieffrai Cyffin Cwnstabl Croesoswallt" in *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, Ed. Ifor Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), 186-88. An online edition of this poem appears at Eurig Salisbury, ed., "Moliant i Sieffrai Cyffin ap Morus o Groesoswallt," *Guto'r Glyn.net*, last accessed 22 March 2014, <http://gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/poem/?poem=096&first-line=001>.

<sup>40</sup> D.J. Bowen, "Beirdd a Noddwyr y Bymthegfed Ganrif," *Llên Cymru* 18 (1994): 85.

If I might travel every fair strait or stream/ And the glorious sea that Mandeville  
travelled/ I would not find a man from the Llŷn to Carlisle/ of such a powerful  
nature except Richard/A bow of the lasting yew, and a Basel blade/ And Richard  
lives like Brazilwood. (ll. 37-42)<sup>41</sup>

The poet's reference to Mandeville serves two related, but independent aims. Mandeville's travels and the marvels he encountered during them are evoked not only to highlight the wonders in Richard's collection, but also to emphasize the marvelous nature of Richard himself. The poet likens his patron to a fine object made from Brazilwood, firmly locating Richard as a marvel equal to the rare curiosities of his collection. Within these lines, we also find an intriguing mixture of local Welsh geography and the fabulous East of Mandeville: Lewys Glyn Cothi suggests that he could retrace Mandeville's steps, but would only have had to limit his search between the Llyn Peninsula and Carlisle, that is, across Wales, to find such a marvelous man. By overlaying the geography of Wales onto the India of Mandeville, he places Wales, its people and its topography, firmly within a larger European tradition of exoticism and travel.

This reliance on Mandeville to accentuate the marvelous nature of the Welsh landscape can be further witnessed in the *ymryson* between Gruffudd Hiraethog (d. 1564) and Sion Brwynog (d. 1567), in which they debate the relative beauty of Tegeingl in Northeast Wales and Gwynedd in the Northwest.<sup>42</sup> In the exchange, Gruffudd Hiraethog, defends his homeland of Tegeingl against charges that it is not as extraordinarily beautiful as he has boasted. He claims that:

*Mal mydrwr, aml ym edrych*  
*Mewn difal lyfr Mawndfil wych;*  
*Fy mawr dasg, fy mwriad oedd,*  
*Fy mryd cyn fy marw ydoedd*  
*Wybod mewn y bywyd mau*

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<sup>41</sup> Lewys Glyn Cothi, "I Risiart Twrbil, O Landudwg" in *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, Vol. I, Ed. E.D. Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), 100-103.

<sup>42</sup> The tradition of enumerating the wonders of Wales dates back well into the Middle Ages, as far back as ps.-Nennius's list of wonders in his *Historia Brittonum*. I would argue that while these poems do not make reference to such native lists, they belong to the same tradition of exoticizing the Welsh landscape. Furthermore, one should note that although he does not reference such lists in this poetic exchange, Gruffudd Hiraethog was the scribe of just such a list in the Peniarth 163ii chronicle discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

*O'r bêl dir ba wlad orau.  
Gwlad Degeingl, golud digoll  
Orau bid ar y byd oll.*

As a poet, I often look/ in the blameless book of the excellent Mandeville;/ It was my great task, my intention,/ my goal before I die/ to know in my life/ which land is best on this great sphere./ Let the land of Tegeingl, unlost riches/ be the best in the whole world. (ll. 1-7)<sup>43</sup>

Like Lewys Glyn Cothi, Gruffudd Hiraethog claims that the marvels of the Welsh landscape surpass those Mandeville encountered. Again, we see Welsh poets evoking the wonders of Mandeville only to dismiss them as unequal to those found in Wales. Unlike Lewys Glyn Cothi, however, Gruffudd Hiraethog refers to Mandeville as a written source of lore from which he often draws. He has perused the “blameless book,” and in all its accounts of various fabled lands, he is unable to find the equal to his corner of Wales.

Mathau Brwmffild (fl. 1530-1545) joins Gruffudd Hiraethog in lauding *The Book of John Mandeville* as a font of poetic inspiration. In a poem praising the parish of Mawddwy, he declares that he walked *phob llwybr dan yr wybren,/ A mynd fal hynt Mawndfil hen/ I edrych, irwych, arael,/ Am le teg ac am wlad hael* (“every path under the sky/ and traveled the same course as old Mandeville/ to look for a noble, pleasant place,/ a fair place and a generous land”) (ll. 5-8).

Eventually, he claims, he discovered this place not in the Far East, but in his own backyard of Mawddwy, whose manifold wonders he enumerates in the poem.<sup>44</sup> Just as in Gruffudd Hiraethog’s panegyric to Tegeingl, the poet, rather than patron, is presented as a metaphorical traveler erroneously seeking wonders in the pages of a book before finding them in Wales. Both Gruffudd Hiraethog and Mathau Brwmffild rely on *The Book of John Mandeville* as their primary source for this knowledge. Notably, Brwmffild quotes Siôn ap Hywel’s praise of Ithel ap Gruffudd, suggesting both the degree to which Mandeville might have become institutionalized

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<sup>43</sup> Gruffudd Hiraethog, “I Goch y Owyts am Ddychanu Tegeingl” in Bowen, *Gwaith Gruffudd Hiraethog*, 409-11.

<sup>44</sup> Mathau Brwmffild, “Moliant dau blwyf Mawddwy” in *Gwaith Mathau Brwmffild*, Ed. A. Cynfael Lake (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2002), 52-53.

as a Welsh bardic figure as well as the ability of the poets to reinvent such figures for new literary aims. By the mid-sixteenth century, the figure of Mandeville could represent not only a wealthy patron's physical travels to exotic lands, but also intellectual and creative journeys made by the poets.

Other poetic references seem to support the use of an English language Mandeville as a source of *auctoritas* among the bards. For example, Lewis Môn's (fl. 1480-1557) elegy to his mentor, Tudur Aled (d. 1525), praises the latter's poetic ability and wisdom through a series of comparisons to great poets of Welsh and continental origin. Lewis Môn refers to figures of Welsh lore, in particular Merlin and Taliesin, but also the thirteenth century bard Adda Fras, as Tudur's spiritual and intellectual fathers. He also draws upon a handful of non-Welsh sources with whose genius he wishes to associate his teacher:

*Ofydd aeth i fedd weithian  
Ys mawr i' lais, Omer lân; ...  
Merddin oedd am urddo'n iaith,  
Min Aled, mur maen eilwaith...  
fal gwaith Mawntfil i gyd  
Mysg y byd, mwys gwybodaeth  
Myfyrdod o'i dafod aeth*

Ovid went hereafter to his grave/ Great is his voice, fair Homer.../ Myrddin  
wanted to dignify our language,/ My Aled, a second stone wall.../ Like all the  
work of Mandeville/ Among the world, sweet knowledge/ Wisdom came from  
his tongue. (ll. 21-52)<sup>45</sup>

Just as Lewys Glyn Cothi and Guto'r Glyn highlight the worldliness of their patrons' possessions and Gruffudd Hiraethog and Mathau Brwmffild accentuate the magnificence of their land through allusions to Mandeville, Lewis Môn emphasizes the sophistication and expanse of his teacher's knowledge. He compares Tudur Aled to Ovid, Homer, and Mandeville, three authors whose works treat issues of travel and wondrous bodies. Interestingly, for Lewis Môn, *The Book of John Mandeville* appears to have shared authority with two of the most eminent poets in the Western imagination, despite the text's relative lack of age and, perhaps most importantly, despite the fact

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<sup>45</sup> Lewis Môn, "Marwnad Tudur Aled" in *Gwaith Tudur Aled*, Vol. II, Ed. T. Gwynn Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1926), 734-36.

it isn't in verse. By granting Mandeville, an English prose writer, equal footing with these two canonical giants, Lewis Môn reveals Mandeville's symbolic potency for the Welsh bards. Mandeville was a source to be learned and could be referred to in the same breath as either Ovid or Taliesin. Unlike Alexander, who symbolized martial strength, Mandeville symbolized something more intellectual: for the poets, Mandeville represented the impulse to classify the world and catalogue its wonders: intellectually, rather than militaristically, conquering the world.

In fact, so great was the Welsh bardic fondness for Mandeville that by the 1570s, still a decade or more before the first Welsh translation of the text, Welsh humanist intellectuals could deride the poets for relying on the work in their poetry. Indeed, some humanists saw this English text as emblematic of provincial Welsh bardic education!<sup>46</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in the *ymryson* that took place between the humanist scholar Edmwnd Prys and Wiliam Cynwal, professional bard and student of Gruffudd Hiraethog, that lasted throughout the 1580s until Cynwal's death in 1588.<sup>47</sup> What began as the means to air a personal grudge revolving around a borrowed bow and bruised egos spiraled over several years and dozens of poems in which the two poets debated the merits of a university versus bardic education. These poems provide a fascinating glimpse into the intellectual worlds of both men as well as into larger sixteenth-century debates regarding pseudohistory and the moral uses of poetry.<sup>48</sup> They also contain a

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<sup>46</sup> Some professional bards also rejected *The Book of John Mandeville* as a legitimate poetical source. For instance, in the aforementioned *ymryson* between Gruffudd Hiraethog and Siôn Brwynog, in response to Gruffudd Hiraethog's use of Mandeville, Siôn Brwynog derides his opponent for his use of the tale. See D.J. Bowen, "Canu Gruffudd Hiraethog i Degeingl," *Llên Cymru* 26 (1974-76): 281-99.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the poets and the history of their debate, see Gruffydd Aled Williams, *Ymryson*, xci-clxxxv; and Williams, "The poetic debate of Edmwnd Prys and Wiliam Cynwal" in *The Renaissance and the Celtic Countries*, Eds. Ceri Davies and John E. Law (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 33-54.

<sup>48</sup> Despite the work of the second Caerwys Eisteddfod and the increasing professionalization of the bardic class during the late sixteenth century, this period saw a sharp decline in the status of professional poetry. At the same time, Welsh humanists were campaigning to keep alive ancient Welsh tradition, including strict-meter poetry. However, despite their championing of traditional Welsh literary forms, many humanists expressed an antipathy towards the poets for what they perceived as their inward-looking educational practices and secrecy regarding the twenty-four strict meters. The *ymryson* between Cynwal and Prys demonstrates many of the grievances the two groups held against each other. For more on the cultural clash between the humanists and bards, see R. Geraint Gruffydd, 26-30; and Goronwy Wyn Owen,

substantial body of Welsh commentary on *The Book of John Mandeville*, which functions throughout the course of the *ymryson* as a symbol for the differences inherent in bardic and humanist educational systems. Mandeville enters the poets' discourse tangentially: in one *cywydd*, Cynwal references Mandeville, describing the work as *gronigl di-sigl...da eurllythr* ("a steadfast chronicle...an excellent book") (20.42-43).<sup>49</sup> In his response, Prys focuses on this offhanded reference as proof that Cynwal and other professional poets lack the intelligence and discernment of his fellow humanists. According to Prys, by appealing to a work like Mandeville, Cynwal has demonstrated that he cannot distinguish truth from fiction or morality from immorality. He claims: *Mynni dysg...mewn dyfal daith Mawndfil deg* ("You desire learning in that scrupulous travel of fair Mandeville") (ll. 13-14).<sup>50</sup> This quest for knowledge within the pages of Mandeville is in vain because, as Prys claims, Mandeville *oedd yn rhydd gelwydd* ("freely lied") (l. 20). Furthermore, Prys suggests, if Cynwal and his fellow-poets accept the outrageous falsehoods found in the book, they are incredibly gullible or, worse, fabulists themselves.

Cynwal refutes these charges, defending the veracity of the text as well as its worth as a source of poetic inspiration. He describes Mandeville as an honorable Christian knight whose own poetic inspiration was known by all to be great. He presents Mandeville as *gwr o ddysg* ("man of learning") and *ystudiwr gost odiaeth* ("a student of marvelous coasts") who *rhodio'r byd...i weld...ryfeddod Dvw* ("traversed the world to see the wonder of God") (ll. 19-28).<sup>51</sup> Moreover, he insists that his rival, having never left Britain himself, is in no position to determine whether or not the wonders of the East exist as Mandeville described them: *Beth wyddost, dôst*

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"Argyfwng y Beirdd a'r Dyneiddwyr yn yr Unfed a'r Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg," *Llên Cymru* 33 (2010): 107-123.

<sup>49</sup> Wiliam Cynwal, "Cywydd 20" in Williams, *Ymryson*, 89-91.

<sup>50</sup> Edmwnd Prys, "Cywydd 24" in *Ibid.*, 107-09.

<sup>51</sup> Wiliam Cynwal, "Cywydd 33" in *Ibid.*, 145-147.



*destyn, /Wedi rhawg nad yw wir hyn?/ Ni buost di, a bost wan...o Loegr allan* (“What do you know? You satirize,/ after a long while, that this is not true?/ A weak boast...You were never outside of England”) (ll. 35-38).

The scholarly consensus regarding this exchange has generally recognized Prys as the winner of the *ymryson*: he produced the majority of its poems, which on the whole tend to be longer and more richly allusive than Cynwal’s contributions. Gruffudd Aled Williams has suggested that *rhyw niwsans oedd yr ymryson yng ngolwg Cynwal* (“the *ymryson* was a kind of nuisance in the opinion of Cynwal”), and has described Cynwal’s submissions as *berfformiad siomedig* (“a disappointing performance”).<sup>52</sup> However, Diana Luft has argued that perhaps Cynwal’s work has been devalued by scholars who too readily “accept Prys’s characterization of his opponent.”<sup>53</sup> I would tend to agree with Luft. In this exchange, for example, Cynwal’s satire is more complex than it first appears. I have argued above that throughout the sixteenth century, professional poets increasingly praised their patrons’ international journeys, using Mandeville as the epitome to which all others might aspire. By highlighting Prys’s lack of travel, Cynwal not only casts doubt upon the type of education Prys wishes to impress upon him, but also suggests that Prys, unlike the widely traveled noble patrons who would appreciate the reference to Mandeville, does not understand the political implications of traditional Welsh verse, a particularly stinging accusation given the overtures that Prys and other humanists had made towards assimilating bardic poetry into new Welsh humanistic modes of thought.

These tensions between old, bardic modes of learning and new, humanistic thought infuse the poems of both Prys and Cynwal. Prys, a product and proponent of university education, consistently berates Cynwal and the bards for privileging traditional, medieval narratives that modern theology and science have falsified. For instance, when Cynwal alludes to the three sons

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, *Ymryson*, clxx.

<sup>53</sup> Luft, 132-33.

of Noah and their tripartite division of the globe, Prys reminds him that the discovery of America has disproven the traditional geography upon which he bases his knowledge. Above all, Prys criticizes what he perceives to be the gullibility of Cynwal and his fellow poets. He claims that the bards have been willfully deluded by Mandeville's book because it wields the dual authority of being in print and being in English (ll. 37-39).<sup>54</sup> He reminds his rival that the works of other fabulists have been printed; the act of printing does not make their words anymore true. He claims: *Huon gynt a'i chwedl hên gav,/ E brintwyd... Chwedlav Eisop, chwyd lysiaint,/ Ag Ofydd fravwydd vn fraint* ("In earlier times, Huon [of Bordeaux] and his old false stories/ were printed...the fables of Aesop, despicable forsaken things/ And weak Ovid were given the same privilege") (ll. 39-42). Prys recommends further reading to Cynwal if he is indeed interested in geography, rather than fables. He writes: *Darllain Mwnster a gerais,/ Ewclides hên, nid clod Sais...O choeliais i vwchlaw Sion/ Groew ffydd cosmographyddion* ("I loved reading [Sebastian] Münster/ and old Euclid, not some famous Englishman...I believed in the pure faith of cosmography/ more than in John [Mandeville]") (ll. 55-60). In other poems in this series, Prys takes Cynwal to task for the bardic reliance on Galfridian history, particularly the prophecies of Merlin, again offering more learned, contemporary histories from which he feels the poets should draw.

It is notable that Prys considered these two figures—Merlin and Mandeville—symbolic of the problems with professional poetry. The former has deep roots in some of the earliest Welsh verse and continued to be a potent symbol of Welsh national sentiment into the modern era; the latter could only have entered the Welsh poetic imagination a century before the *ymryson* took place, and then solely through the medium of English. However, Mandeville continued to be source of poetic inspiration for Welsh bards, inciting the poetic geographic imagination more than Euclid or Münster could have ever hoped to do. Furthermore, despite Prys's claims to the contrary, these legendary figures appealed to Welsh humanist audiences as well. Although Prys

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<sup>54</sup> Edmwnd Prys, "Cywydd 42" in Williams, *Ymryson*, 187-89.

repeatedly derides Mandeville throughout the *ymryson*, in one *cywydd* he narrates the story of Alexander and Porus, likening himself to the Indian king without any acknowledgment that his poetry depends on the same medieval narrative tradition for which he has mocked Cynwal. The humanistic debates regarding Galfridian history discussed in previous chapters demonstrate the continued relevance of medieval narrative throughout the early modern period among bards and humanists alike. In fact, it was the humanist scholars and scribes rather than the professional poets who reinvented and renewed the legendary figures of Mandeville and Alexander in the new translations that appeared during the last decades of the Tudor era.

#### SIXTEENTH-CENTURY REVISIONS OF MEDIEVAL TRADITIONS

As I have shown in this chapter, late medieval Welsh representations of both Alexander and Mandeville are generally positive. By the late sixteenth century, however, the characterization of these medieval explorers underwent a sea change. David Williams has noted how the figure of Alexander in particular was continually being reinvented by various groups and traditions throughout the Middle Ages to serve differing political and cultural aims. He describes Alexander as a “polyvalent” hero, who *devient son propre texte, un texte si souple que chaque culture qui le reçoit peut y inscrire ses propres valeurs morales et sa vision spirituelle* (“becomes his own text, a text so flexible that each culture who receives him can inscribe onto him its own moral values and spiritual vision”).<sup>55</sup> In the late sixteenth-century Welsh versions of both Alexander and Mandeville, this flexibility is apparent. While these characters signify power, virtue, and sophistication in early strict meter poetry, early modern prose and free meter adaptations of the medieval material highlight their cupidity, often critiquing exploration as a fundamentally covetous act.

The most prominent shared feature of these late sixteenth century materials is the way in which they reinterpret the medieval discourse of travel to consider empire building from the perspective of the colonized Eastern peoples who appear in the texts. These translations and

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<sup>55</sup> Williams, “Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature anglaise médiévale,” 360.

adaptations develop the figures of Alexander and Mandeville beyond the straightforward roles they play in the allusive language of bardic panegyric. These texts contain fuller treatments of the characters than ever seen before in the Welsh tradition. *The Book of John Mandeville* appears in two forms during this period: in an incomplete prose translation of Thomas East's 1568 print edition of the work and in a free meter (*canu rhydd*) adaptation of the same text. The history of the *Alexandreis* in Welsh is a bit more complicated and piecemeal. The lengthy poem was never fully translated into Welsh; instead, a handful of episodes were excerpted and adapted into prose over the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

In the Welsh *Alexandreis* passages, Alexander is transformed from mighty emperor into either a petty warlord or a feeble child. The most popular of these excerpts included the section of the Latin text in which Aristotle lectures a young Alexander on the nature of good leadership, often given the Welsh title *Ystori Alestotlys yn cynghori Alecsander Mawr* ("The Story of Aristotle Counseling Alexander the Great").<sup>56</sup> The passage can be found in four extant manuscript witnesses between 1574 and 1607 and was copied by Llywelyn Siôn of Llangewydd and John Jones of Gellilyfdy, both notable professional scribes associated with the humanist and antiquarian movements in Wales.<sup>57</sup> In the passage, Aristotle urges his student to consider the importance of moderation in rule. The translation begins *in media res* as Aristotle witnesses a visibly distressed Alexander who explains that he is upset because the territory of his father, now too old and weak to lead, has come under control of Darius:

*Argwlydd athro heb ef llyma vnnghwyn i am llid nidamgen nam bod i vy hyn yn  
vab iefanck gwann am tad yn wr henn gwannbrydd darfodedic a bod i gyfoeth ef  
yn ddi arddelw ac heb ymddiffin iddaw a bod dared vrenin yn vrenin yn  
gorchfygy groec*

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<sup>56</sup> This passage appears in Book I of the *Alexandreis*. For a general history of the international popularity of this passage, see Cary, 105-10.

<sup>57</sup> See Pritchard, "Aristotle's Advice to Alexander," 295-308. Llywelyn Siôn and John Jones played an important role in the transmission of medieval *mirabilia* material. Llywelyn Siôn also copied the *gŵr moel* material discussed below, as well as the *llong foel* material discussed in Chapter Two. John Jones copied, among other texts, a version of the Welsh poetic Mandeville.

“Lord and Teacher,” he said, “here is my complaint and my anger: Me, I am nothing but a young weak boy, and my father is an old man, feeble-minded and wasting away. His realm is unclaimed and undefended, and King Darius is conquering Greece.

Notably, Alexander’s description of the bitterness he feels regarding the conquest of his own land is a Welsh interpolation not found in the source material. Although the same passage from the *Alexandreis* describes Alexander’s anger, claiming *accusabat enim occultam rubor igneus iram* (“indeed a fiery passion betrayed his hidden anger”) (I.73), the Welsh version expands upon this detail and provides a first person account of Alexander’s troubles. The Welsh translator transforms the passage into a dialogue between Alexander and Aristotle in which they examine the nature of conquest and the anguish it causes both the future emperor and the Greek people as a whole.<sup>58</sup> This stylistic change subtly affects our interpretation of the Welsh text in two important ways. First, by giving voice to Alexander, the translation places him in the position of the conquered rather than conqueror and articulates the frustration and anger felt by those who have similarly faced the loss of autonomy. Furthermore, by presenting Darius’s aggression as a threat to all of *Groec*, instead of just Alexander’s own inheritance as does its Latin source, the Welsh translation entwines the fate of Alexander with the fate of Greece. By doing so, the Welsh version of the episode presents a narrative concerned with the justice and benevolence of kings and the dignity of the ruled.

The rest of the passage details Aristotle’s advice on such leadership. Aristotle responds by convincing Alexander that he has the internal fortitude to lead the Greeks to a victory over Darius so long as he can maintain a just rule. He claims that a good ruler must reward honest men, be fair in his judgments, invigorate his troops in battle without gloating over the loss of his enemy, and generously grant gifts while avoiding excessive luxury. In other words, a good ruler should privilege justice over his own earthly desires. Although the differences are subtle, the characterization of Alexander in this text marks a palpable departure from medieval Welsh

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<sup>58</sup> See Walter of Chatillôn *The Alexandreis: A Twelfth-century Epic of Walter of Châtillon*, Ed. and Trans. David Townsend (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2007).

Alexander material. In earlier texts, Alexander singlehandedly conquers much of the globe, exemplifying hypermasculine individuality; in contrast, this version of Alexander emphasizes the need for cooperation between ruler and the ruled. Taken together, these disparate depictions of Alexander create a sense of irony for the reader. In *Ystory Alestotlys yn cynghori Alecsander*, Alexander is a mere boy who has yet to perform the legendary deeds of romance, and the pain he feels in regards to the conquest of his land and people is presented sympathetically. The reader would already be familiar with the Alexander's biography and necessarily contrast the type of imperious rule the figure of Alexander embodies in the medieval literary tradition to the more cooperative model of governance that Aristotle promotes in *Ystory Alestotlys*.

While the advice from Aristotle to Alexander subtly invites its readers to ruminate over the justice of Alexander's rule, the other Welsh *Alexandreis* passage, which appears directly before Aristotle's advice in NLW MS 13075B, openly lambastes Alexander's program of conquest. The passage, entitled *Ystori y Gŵr Moel o Sythia*, or "The Story of the Bald Man of Scythia," narrates the scathing monologue of a Scythian nobleman to Alexander on the eve of the emperor's campaign into his land. The Scythian reminds the emperor that his glory is fleeting and that he will soon have to pay for the damage he has inflicted on the people he has subjugated.<sup>59</sup> The Scythian's contempt for his conqueror is unabashed; he forthrightly explains to Alexander that due to the trauma the emperor has inflicted on all whom he meets, he has earned the hatred of the world. He claims: *wr da nad oes vn dyn ar y ddaear kyn gased gan bob dyn a thydi* ("good sir, there is not one man on the earth as hated by everyone as you").<sup>60</sup> The Scythian's protest echoes

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<sup>59</sup> R.T. Pritchard, "Ystori y Gŵr Moel o Sythia," *Studia Celtica* 18/19 (1983-4): 216-33. I will be referring to the NLW MS 13075B version of this tale. It also appears in Cardiff MS Prose 2.621 (Hafod 8), another collection of prose. In both manuscripts, *Ystori y Gŵr Moel o Sythia* appears alongside the *llong foel* legend as well as other tales of antiquarian interest. This manuscript also contains medical lore, including a copy of the *Secretum Secretorum*, a medieval medical treatise popularly considered a letter from Aristotle to Alexander. For more on the Welsh tradition of the *Secretum Secretorum*, see Elizabeth Mainir James, *Secretum Secretorum: Astudiaeth Feirniadol o Ddetholiadau Cymraeg a Lladin o'r Llythyr Ffug-Aristotelaidd at Alecsander Fawr* (Ph.D. thesis, Aberystwyth University, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> Although they do not appear frequently in the corpus of Welsh literature, Scythians played a substantial role in Irish pseudohistory: where Welsh national histories sought a Trojan origin for the British, some Irish

Alexander's own complaint to Aristotle; in this text, Alexander has taken the place of Darius, seemingly learning little from his tutelage under the philosopher.

For the Scythian, Alexander embodies the greed of man and his shortsightedness in his pursuit of worldly fame and treasure. He exclaims: *nad oedd ddigon gennyd, gael yr holl vyd yt dy hyn kans i mae y Dwyrain, ar Gorllewyn, yth law...kans ti a vynydd oresgyn yr holl vyd o gwbl* ("It wasn't enough for you to possess the whole world, for the East and the West are in your hands...because you want to conquer the whole world"). On the surface, it seems that Alexander has successfully seized Scythia and subdued its inhabitants; however, the Scythian informs us that the emperor, in pursuit of worldly wealth, has forsaken the laws of God, which will leave him unfulfilled and ultimately damned: *ddwyd ti yn torri kyfraith ddiw aü orchmynion ag velly, ny welaf j ddim a dykio i ti. Rag maint yw dy chwant ath awydd kans ny byddy di vodlon er a gyffych* ("You break God's law and his commandments and thus, I see nothing that will avail you. Because of the greatness of your desire and your greed, you will not be happy despite your conquests"). Scott Lightsey has noted that within certain Middle English didactic traditions (notably John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*), Alexander functions as a "monstrous exemplar of earthly rule."<sup>61</sup> The Alexander of *Ystori y Gŵr Moel* fulfills a similar role: his cruelty exemplifies the dangers that accompany rejecting natural and divine law in pursuit of secular power. Whereas

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histories claimed that the Irish stemmed from the Scythians. This claim was appropriated by English historians of Ireland by the late sixteenth century, in particular Edmund Spenser in his *A view of the present state of Ireland* (c.1596), during the period of renewed English colonial claims to that land. Furthermore, British explorers to America often described its natives as Scythian-like cannibals, implicitly linking the perceived savages of the new Western border of the *oikumene* to those of its former Western border, the Gaels. It is perhaps significant that the story of Alexander and the Scythian found new popularity in Wales during this same time. For more, see Andrew Hadfield, "Briton and Scythian: Tudor Representations of Irish Origins," *Irish Historical Studies* 28.112 (1993): 390-408; Derek Hirst, "Text, Time, and the Pursuit of 'British Identities'" in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, 260-64; and Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 108.

earlier Welsh depictions of Alexander conferred upon him divine grace for his deeds, this version of Alexander suffers a more harrowing fate born from his lust for conquest.

In this way, *Ystori y Gŵr Moel* reads as a *memento mori* for rich men who would abuse their power, functioning similarly to the role of Alexander in the *ubi sunt* genre of poetry discussed above. Unlike the Alexander poems of this medieval genre, however, *Ystori y Gŵr Moel* places its warning against the perils of conquest in the mouth of a subjugated man who will not lament the loss of the great conqueror, as the panegyrist does, but instead will revel in his downfall. The *gŵr moel* passage reminds readers that the power of all great men eventually withers, but asserts that the disenfranchised masses, rather than fate, are responsible for their fall. For example, the Scythian admits to Alexander that should the Greeks choose to continue his military campaign against his fellow countrymen, they will surely prevail. Due to the decentralized nature of their society, the Scythians cannot mount a successful attack against Alexander's army. The Scythian explains:

*nidoes i ni gyvanheddau eithr mewn gogvav, anial, a dyfaith goedydd i byddwn ni  
megis anevailaid gwyllton...ny vynnwn ni lywodraeth neb arnom ag ny chaiswn  
ninnav vaistrolaeth ar neb*

we have no dwelling places except wild caves and wooded wastelands, we are like wild animals...we do not want any government to rule us and we do not attempt mastery over anyone.<sup>62</sup>

Although the text exhibits a certain level of contempt for the nomadic nature of the Scythians, deeming them "like wild animals," the Scythians are depicted as living in a noble savagery contrasted with Alexander's greedy abundance, and the reader is encouraged to sympathize with their plight. The Scythian spokesperson ensures that his countryman will stage a counterattack, however futile, chipping away at Alexander's forces to the best of their ability. Furthermore, although the Scythian insurrection will likely fail, others who are more powerful will witness Alexander's injustice towards them and eventually bring about his demise. The Scythian is defiant in his response. He proclaims:

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<sup>62</sup> The figure of the defiant Scythian also calls to mind the trope of the American Noble Savage discussed in Chapter Four whose verbal assaults on Western explorers critiqued European moral hypocrisy.



*pan debygych di dy fod ti gwedy yn gorfod ni i byddwn ni yn dechrav ymladd a  
thi...ag yn ryvely arnad o vewn yth lv kans byanach a chynt yw yn tylodi ni nath  
allv di ath gyvoeth*

when you threaten that you have conquered us, we will begin to fight you...and  
wage war on you from within the ranks of your own host because our poverty is  
nimblar and swifter than your strength and your wealth.

He ends his speech by commanding Alexander to *phaid ath ryvely, a does di adrefyth wlad dy  
hvn, a gad ni yn llonydd ag yn heddwch* (“Quit waging war, and go home to your own land, and  
leave us in peace and quiet”). This version of Alexander couldn’t differ more greatly from the  
Alexander of, for example, Lewys Morgannwg, who was writing only decades earlier. Whereas  
the poet praised Alexander (and, in turn, Henry VIII) for the fierce and cruel ways in which he  
disposed of his enemies, the Alexander of this *Ystori y Gŵr Moel* reminds readers that such  
actions can and do lead to revolt.<sup>63</sup>

The Welsh translation does not provide Alexander’s response to the Scythian’s diatribe,  
but only claims that

*er son a thrafferth y gwr moel o Sythia, ny lestaiaiwdd Alexander ar i siwrnai,  
namyn dyvod aŷ longav yn rwydd i wlad Sythia ir lann. Ag velly terfyna*

despite the speech and trouble of the bald man of Scythia, Alexander was not  
hindered on his journey, but instead easily came with his fleet to the shores of the  
land of Scythia. And thus it ends.

In the original Latin *Alexandreis*, this episode concludes with a description of the battle fought in  
Scythia and a passage in which Alexander expresses intention to continue his conquests in  
neighboring lands.<sup>64</sup> The portrayal of Alexander in this section of the Latin poem is problematic:  
the poem depicts Alexander’s cruelty while at the same time it celebrates his victories. Even as

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<sup>63</sup> Maura Lafferty, “Walter of Chatillôn’s *Alexandreis*” in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the  
Middle Ages*, Ed. David Zuwiya (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 190.

<sup>64</sup> Compare the finality of the last line of the Welsh translation to the conclusion of the episode in the  
*Alexandreis*: “So, too, although the Scythians had broken the assaults of Medes, Persia and Assyria, yet  
they succumb to Alexander, when that bloody sword of fate, the world’s lone scourge, fell on them swifter  
and more savagely than Boreas’ icy wings. So fate decreed. Among the neighboring tribes, swift Rumor  
prattled...” (VIII.572-79, trans. Townsend). The difference between the Latin and Welsh versions of the  
text can be explained by the de-contextualized nature of the Welsh translation, which contrasts to the long  
narrative structure of the Latin original. However, one must wonder why the Welsh translator chose to  
conclude the episode where he did, considering that the Latin passage continues for another thirty-seven  
lines.

the *Alexandreis* asks readers to remember the costs of war, it ultimately exonerates Alexander, instead blaming *fatorum gladius, terrarum publica pestis* (“the sword of fate, the common plague of the world”) (VIII.493) for the devastation of the Scythians. This is not the case in *Ystori y Gŵr Moel o Sythia*. Suzanne Conklin Akbari has suggested that the body of literature commonly known as the Alexander Romance fictionalizes a narrative of *translatio imperii* from East to West in which the figure of Alexander serves as a “mediator between the familiar space of home and the exotic terrain abroad.”<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Christine Chism has argued that in much of the Alexander literature, the foreign peoples whom Alexander faces are versions of “his own carefully exoticized shadow.”<sup>66</sup> Both would argue that the audience of this literature would identify with Alexander as representative of Western cultural and political hegemony. The Alexander of the Welsh prose tradition, however, deviates sharply from this archetype. The Welsh version of the episode aligns the reader solely with the subjugated Scythians, while presenting Alexander as a mute, destructive force, driven by avarice.

Of course, the view of Alexander as mindless conqueror is not unique to the Welsh literary tradition. Early on in its history, Christian moralists adapted episodes from the Alexander legend to serve didactic narratives that emphasized the emperor’s greed and questioned the morality of conquest.<sup>67</sup> In the English tradition, perhaps the most notable critique of Alexander comes from John Gower. In Book Three of his late fourteenth-century poem *Confessio Amantis*,

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<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Alexander in the Orient: Bodies and Boundaries in the *Roman de toute chevalerie*” in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, Eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 112.

<sup>66</sup> Christine Chism, “Too Close for Comfort: Disorienting Chivalry in *The Wars of Alexander*” in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination of the European Middle Ages*, Eds. Sylvia Tomasch and Sean Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>67</sup> See Gerrit Bunt, “An Exemplary Hero: Alexander the Great” in *A Companion to Middle English Romance*, Eds. Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), 29-55.

Gower presents Alexander as a foolish, greedy, and unjust ruler.<sup>68</sup> He retells the story of Alexander and Diogenes (III.1201-1330), a philosopher whom Alexander meets on the road. Alexander notices Diogenes sunbathing, and the sight of the peaceful old man compels the emperor to display his power to the philosopher. Alexander offers him any treasure in the world, but Diogenes responds that he simply wishes to be left alone. Alexander is properly humbled. In the same book of the *Confessio*, Gower later recounts the story of Alexander and the Pirate (III.2363-2480). Although Alexander has condemned the pirate to death, his life is spared when he convinces the emperor that there is little difference between piracy and legitimate conquest. The pirate's logic greatly impresses Alexander: instead of executing him, the emperor grants him an important position in his retinue. Despite these examples, however, the English language literary tradition generally depicts Alexander favorably.<sup>69</sup> Just as the Welsh panegyrists found the image of a strong Alexander a useful one for establishing the political relevance of their patrons, so too did English authors employ Alexander to reflect the concerns of the English gentry.<sup>70</sup> Even when English authors contemplate the negative aspects of Alexander's reign, they provide him with dialogue, allowing the character either to defend himself or amend his ways. In contrast, *Ystori y Gŵr Moel* silences Alexander, permitting only his opponents a voice. This dynamic seems distinctly Welsh; it also appears in the playful example of Edmwnd Prys's retelling of the story of Porus, an Indian king, and Alexander in a *cywydd* addressed to Wiliam Cynwal.<sup>71</sup> Porus's valor inspires the emperor to such an extent that Alexander cedes his land and title to his foe despite the Indian king's defeat in battle. Prys refigures the military conflict between the two leaders as a poetic battle between himself and Cynwal, suggesting that his poetic ability, though

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<sup>68</sup> John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. II, Eds. Russell A. Peck and Andrew Galloway (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> See Williams, "Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature anglaise médiévale," 356-60.

<sup>70</sup> See Chism, 137; and Lafferty, 118-19.

<sup>71</sup> Edmwnd Prys, "Cywydd 52" in Williams, *Ymryson*, 227-31.

amateur, will cause the professional bard Cynwal to concede his strengths. In this poem, both Alexander and Cynwal serve as silent objects of scorn.

Alexander was not the sole medieval figure associated with territorial expansion and conquest to undergo a renaissance in Tudor Wales: John Mandeville also experienced a new popularity during this time. In contrast to his appearances in medieval bardic poetry, Mandeville is not an entirely independent character in late sixteenth-century Welsh literature; his development cannot be separated from the figure of Alexander and the metamorphosis that character underwent in the literature of the time. Alexander features in both the verse and the prose Welsh *Mandeville*. In the former, the eponymous traveler finds relics of Alexander's own peregrinations during his time in the Far East and relays the stories the indigenous peoples recount concerning the emperor. Alexander appears only briefly in the prose *Mandeville*; just as in *Ystori y Gŵr Moel*, he looms along the edges of the tale as a silent, brute force whose martial conquests have shaped the land and the history of the people who live within it. For example, Mandeville recalls traveling to the land of the Amazons and describes their rituals, including the burning of their right breasts and their practice of sending away any sons born to them to live in other lands. As an aside, he notes that *wrth yr ynys honno y may tir elwir Cermwgt a hwnw sydd dir da frwythlon ac yno y gnaeth alexander syttai* ("beside that island [i.e. the land of the Amazons] there is a land called Cermwgt which is a good and fruitful land and there Alexander made a city").<sup>72</sup> Over time, according to the text, Alexander constructed towers there and changed its name from Cermwgt to Alexandria. The English text from which the Welsh *Mandeville* draws does not mention this civilizing aspect of Alexander's visit to the island; in the Welsh

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<sup>72</sup> My own transcription from the Prose *Mandeville* in British Library, Addl. MS 14921, fol. 53v. Little work has been done on this manuscript, which contains only a crudely illustrated translation of Mandeville. The text is incomplete and was probably composed between 1580 and 1600. Several folia are quite damaged, and others show significant signs of use. Little is yet known about the manuscript history, although an inscription indicates that it found its way into the library of Richard Morris of Anglesey, antiquarian and co-founder of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion, in the early eighteenth century.

version, the land of Cermwgt is erased, populated by towers (a visible reminder of military presence with which the Welsh were very familiar) and eventually absorbed into Alexander's own identity, being renamed in his honor. Although the Welsh *Mandeville* doesn't mention the episode, a reader familiar with the Alexander legend might recall that the emperor's rape of Cermwgt's neighbors, the Amazons, was one of the crimes decried in the Book of Taliesin poems. While the brief story of Alexander and Cermwgt lacks the overt violence of *Ystori y Gŵr Moel*, its implications are clear.

The depiction of Alexander in the verse *Mandeville* is no less menacing. The verse *Mandeville* includes several episodes in which Alexander is confronted and properly humbled by those he is attempting to conquer.<sup>73</sup> One episode centers on the emperor's well-known encounter with the Brahmins in India, who criticize Alexander's greed and question why he desires to conquer new lands when he already possesses so much of the world. The Brahmins are highly praised for their moral purity: despite the fact they are not Christian, they keep God's laws better than most of Christendom. The poet remarks:

*ag mae yno ynys hefyd  
ar bobl dduwiola n ybyd  
ar ynys a elwir bragannon  
eraill ai geilw r ynys ffyddlon  
ag i meant kimin hun  
yn kadw y deg gorchymun*

And there is another island/ with the most pious people in the world/ and the island is called Bragannon [i.e. land of the Brahmins]./ Others call it the island of the faithful./ And that community/ keeps the ten commandments. (ll. 777-82)

God rewards them for this behavior with beautiful land that suffers neither storm nor famine; neither can any adulterers, beggars, nor murderers be found in the land, leading the narrator to exclaim: *mae yn ddigon tebig/ i bod gan dduw yn ddewisig* ("it is quite likely that they were chosen by God") (ll. 793-94). Alexander is equally impressed when he came *ir wlad hono iw*

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<sup>73</sup> According to its colophon, the Welsh verse *Mandeville* was composed by Richard ap John of Scorlegan in 1586. Two copies are extant and assumed to derive from this lost exemplar: NLW MS 1553A (dated from 1604 in the hands of Thomas Evans and Roger Morris) and Peniarth 218 (dated between 1605 and 1610 in the hand of John Jones of Gellilyfdy). See Davies, "Siôn Mawndfil," 291-92.

*gorchfygu* (“to that land to conquer them”) (ll. 804). Awed by their piety, he offers them his vast wealth. He informs the virtuous and wise Brahmins that he wishes to bring them into his inner circle where they, too, will be able to acquire riches and land.

The Brahmins, however, reject his offer and ask why they should desire incorporation into the society of man when they have been so blessed by following the natural law of God. They claim that their simple riches outshine Alexander’s ornate treasures; whereas his possessions are illusory and transitory, their wealth lies in *heddwch a chydgordiad a ffob da* (“peace and concord and every sort of virtue”) (ll. 808-09). Alexander is humbled by this response and agrees to leave them in peace, abandoning his mission of conquest; furthermore, he vows to protect the Brahmins from others who would wish them harm. He pledges to correct the errors of his ways now that he has learned from them a serenity that he can neither buy with his gold nor take with his sword. Despite its importance in the development of Alexander’s character in the text, the reader only learns of the emperor’s resolution through the narrator: again, Alexander is given no voice of his own. The Welsh version of this tale differs from many other medieval and early modern representations of this scene, which was among the most popular stories associated with Alexander. Other accounts depict the emperor in dialogue with the Brahmins, in particular Dindamus with whom the emperor debates the relative merits of the Greek and Brahmin ways of life.<sup>74</sup> In the Welsh translation, however, Alexander is not provided the opportunity to justify his actions; instead, he remains silent and humiliated in the face of the Brahmin’s verbal onslaught.

This incident demonstrates the levels to which the sixteenth-century Welsh Alexander tradition emphasizes the emperor’s moral failings; Alexander’s opponents serve the sole narrative purpose of censuring him and critiquing his lust for land and power. In each of Alexander’s appearances in the verse *Mandeville*, he is shamed by his potential subjects and forced to admit

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<sup>74</sup> See Bunt, “Exemplary Hero,” 34-35; and R.T. Pritchard, “Alexander and the Brahmins in National Library of Wales, NLW MS 11611C,” *National Library of Wales Journal* 28.2 (1993-94): 97-106.

the folly of conquest and the accumulation of worldly goods. In another short passage, the poem's narrator relates a trip Alexander made to the land of Sinobl, a land renowned for its prophets (ll. 690-706).<sup>75</sup> In Sinobl, he approaches a prophet who can prognosticate the fate of his empire. The prophet, however, refuses to foretell the future of Greece as Alexander requests; instead, he advises the emperor of the foolishness of his military campaigns. The prophet asks him *pam yr wyt yn rhyfelu...i ynill i ti y kwbl/ oni elli estyn dy hoedl* ("why do you wage war...to win the whole world for yourself/ when you are not able to extend your own life?") (ll. 701-4). Given the impermanence of Alexander's own life, the prophet argues, his attempt to accumulate equally impermanent fame and wealth is futile. The narrator does not provide Alexander's response to this claim; in the following lines, however, he reports that Alexander rewards the prophet for his honesty by protecting his land from future threats of conquest: *ag wrth yr ateb hwnnw,/ fe gafodd gwlad i chadw* ("and in answer to this response/ the land was protected") (ll. 705-6). It is clear that Alexander learns from these encounters: he admires the integrity and the simplicity of people like the Brahmins and the prophet. Yet, despite the poet's claims concerning the emperor's moral growth, the reader never witnesses Alexander's change of heart directly, but only hears about it through the poem's narrator who reports the stories as ancient history.

This marginalization of Alexander within the text is more striking when contrasted with the characterization, or rather lack of characterization, of Mandeville himself in the verse adaptation. As mentioned above, the verse *Mandeville* is a free verse narrative poem that roughly follows the plot of the English Defective version of *The Book of John Mandeville* with one glaring exception: rather than present the tale as the experiences of John Mandeville, knight of St. Albans, the Welsh verse *Mandeville* reframes the narrative as a dialogue between the man and his talking pet raven who has traversed the world in his stead. Traditionally, the story of John Mandeville appears as a first person narrative claiming to be the true account of a fourteenth-century journey to the Holy Land and beyond. The Welsh verse *Mandeville* refashions the story

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<sup>75</sup> Davies, "Siôn Mawndfil," 316-15.

into a frame narrative in which Mandeville and his raven discuss the marvels the bird has witnessed in the far-flung lands of the East. The poem begins as the two reunite after some time apart, and Mandeville asks the raven what he has seen in the interim: *Dydd da fo iti y gigfran/ ple buost or wlad allan* (“Good day to you, raven./ To what places have you traveled outside of this land?”) (ll. 1-2). The raven replies:

*mi a euthum dros y moroedd  
i lawer iawn o ynysoedd  
i gael gweled rhyfeddode  
mewn amryw dynase*

I went across the seas/ to a great many islands/ to catch a glimpse of the wonders/  
in all the various kingdoms (ll. 5-8)

Intrigued by the raven’s tales of wonder, Mandeville beseeches the bird: *mynega dithe i mine/ newyddion or tyrnase/ ar ynysoedd a gwledydd* (“report to me/ news from the kingdoms/ on the islands and in the lands”) (ll. 13-15). Although the raven initially demurs, claiming *nid yw abl fy meddwl/ i dreuthu i ti y kwawl/ a weles i o ryfeddode* (“my mind is not able/ to express to you/ all the wonders I saw”) (ll. 17-19), he soon agrees to recount his journey to the Far East. The poem narrates the raven’s many adventures, occasionally punctuating the text with the phrase *mi a hedais* (“I flew”) to remind the reader of the identity of the narrator. Instead of traveling to view the world for himself, Mandeville receives a literal birds-eye view of the globe as he listens to the tales his raven brings back from his flight around the world.

Thus Mandeville, who even a few decades before had symbolized sophistication and world travel to Welsh poets, is barely a character in the Welsh poetic rendition of his tale, a feature that is unique to this adaptation. Although several English metrical adaptations exist, including some folk ballads that present the story in the form of a third person narrative, I have found little connection between this tradition and the Welsh *Mandeville*.<sup>76</sup> While several of these English metrical versions de-emphasize Mandeville’s narrative voice, none replaces him entirely

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<sup>76</sup> For more information on the figure of Mandeville in early modern English ballad, see Davies, “Siôn Mawndfil,” 294-96; and Moseley, “Metamorphoses.”



as does the Welsh verse adaptation. Only in the metrical Welsh version does Mandeville, the greatest of all medieval travelers, choose to stay in England. Furthermore, the Welsh poem also understates the role the raven plays as cultural ambassador between East and West. Notably, the raven gathers his stories by spying on others from above, rather than engaging those he meets; in most other versions, Mandeville converses with the wondrous people he encounters and explores the exotic landscapes he visits. Mary Baine Campbell has discussed the important role of the figure of the eyewitness in *The Book of John Mandeville* and other premodern travel narratives. She argues that first person narration creates a sense of verisimilitude within the text that granted Mandeville the status of *auctoritas* among his earliest reading publics.<sup>77</sup> By divorcing the character of Mandeville from the medieval rhetoric of travel and cultural conquest, the Welsh metrical version calls this *auctoritas* into question.

Although the Welsh poem's devoicing of Mandeville has little in common with late medieval and early modern English metrical versions of the text, it shares striking similarities with certain genres of Welsh popular poetry, in particular the *cywyddau llatai* (love poems) and the *cerddi rhydd* (free meter poetry). The motif of messenger birds appears throughout late medieval and early modern Welsh poetry, and Brinley Rees has suggested this trope is particularly characteristic of Welsh love poetry in general.<sup>78</sup> While songbirds are most commonly found in premodern Welsh romantic verse, ravens are not unheard of in such poetry. For example, in the *cywyddau llatai* between Dafydd Llwyd and Gwerful Mechain discussed above, Gwerful encourages her poem's messenger to fly like Noah's raven to the four corners of the earth.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 126-27.

<sup>78</sup> Brinley Rees, *Dulliau'r Canu Rhydd, 1500-1650* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952), 60-73.

<sup>79</sup> Noah's raven, which he dispatches along with a dove to see if the universal flood has subsided (Genesis 8:7-8), is likely the archetype of raven as messenger. Although the biblical text makes little note of the bird, a substantial body of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim apocrypha grew up around the raven that presents the bird as foul and unreliable. I do not believe this tradition greatly informs the Welsh verse *Mandeville*, as the raven in this text dutifully reports back to his human companion. However, given the moralizing tone of the final lines of the poem, it is possible that the raven is to be admonished for bring back tales of sinfulness from throughout the world.

theme of the avian messenger also features in contemporaneous free meter poems about travel and adventure. In a poem entitled “Ymddiddan rhwng Gwr a’r Pelican” (“Conversation between a Man and the Pelican”), Welsh sailor and amateur poet Wiliam Peilyn fictionalizes his journey through the West Indies as a member of the British navy: he recounts his adventures to a pelican who promises to deliver his stories to his friends and family back in Wales.<sup>80</sup> The sailor describes the exotic people he has encountered, including cannibals and other enemies of Christendom; he encourages the pelican to report to the Queen that while the English members of the fleet faltered at the sight of such horrors, the Welshmen among them firmly stood their ground. Yet, despite the thematic and linguistic similarities between this poem and the verse *Mandeville*, a glaring difference exists between the works. Peilyn’s poem glorifies Tudor conquest; his conversation with the pelican is simply a conceit that allows him to elaborate upon the wonders he and his fellow Welsh sailors witnessed in their naval service. Peilyn’s voice is very much present throughout the poem, and his sensationalistic descriptions of the people of the Caribbean are meant to titillate the imaginations of his readers in Britain. The verse *Mandeville*, on the other hand, expresses a deep antipathy towards such travel, using the motif of avian flight to create a barrier between the wonders of the world and the poem’s readers.

Part of this reluctance towards travel stems from the evil which the narrator sees as plaguing the world, suggesting that the traveler infects himself with whatever foreign sins he is exposed to in other lands. After the raven finishes his tale, the poem ends with a polemic delivered by Mandeville in which he speaks of the dangers of the secular world and implicitly

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<sup>80</sup> E. Vincent Evans, “Welsh Adventurers to the West Indies in the Sixteenth Century: With a Contemporary Ballad, by Liffenant Wiliam Peilyn,” *Y Cymmrodor* 26 (1916): 215-23. Note that the title given to the poem is “ymddiddan rhwng gwr a pelican” (“conversation between a man and a pelican”), which resembles the title of the Welsh verse *Mandeville* in NLW 1553A, “ymddiddanion a fu rhwng yr holwr ar gigfran” (“conversations that were between the interrogator and the raven”). For more on the verse *Mandeville* and the genre of *ymddiddan*, see T.H. Parry-Williams, *Canu Rhydd Cynnar* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1932), lxxviii.

calls upon the reader to tend his own spiritual garden, so to speak.<sup>81</sup> He claims that the raven's story demonstrates that the people of the world *yn llosgi mewn kybyddra* ("burn in avarice") (l. 942). Sarah Salih and Mary Baine Campbell have shown the ways in which Mandeville demonstrates a certain level of tolerance towards the strange people and religious customs he encounters, while scholars such as Andrew Fleck and Martin Camargo have suggested that Mandeville's identity becomes increasingly fragmented throughout the text until it becomes indistinguishable from that of the pagans.<sup>82</sup> In the verse *Mandeville*, the raven hints at such tolerance: he finds virtue in men like the Brahmins and consistently marvels at the curious things he sees, considering their strangeness a testament to the diversity of God's creation. However, in the coda, Mandeville rejects these overtures towards integration of East and West, finding only sin and the work of the devil in the raven's stories of foreign peoples. Mandeville lists pride, adultery, and avarice as the three principle sins of the world, although he focuses his critique on avarice. Similar to its role in the early modern Welsh Alexander material, travel in the verse *Mandeville* leads to insatiable greed. The only defense against this greed, the poem suggests, is to do as does Mandeville and avoid leaving one's own land. This unwillingness to travel speaks to a deep ambivalence toward border crossing that can be found throughout the verse *Mandeville*, as well as the other sixteenth-century adaptations discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>81</sup> The idea that travel could corrupt the Welsh was not an uncommon motif in contemporaneous poetry. Young Welsh men were warned of the attractions and dangers of foreign cities, in particular London, and the ways in which their own moral compass could falter in such environments. For example, see Thomas Prys of Plasiolyn's "Kowydd i ddangos mai uffern yw Llvndain" ("Cywydd to show that London is hell"). Dafydd Huw Evans, "Cywydd i Ddangos Mai Uffern yw Llundain" in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* XIV, Ed. J.E. Caerwyn Williams (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1988), 134-51.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 154-61; Sarah Salih, "Idols and Simulacra: Paganity, Hybridity, and Representation in *Mandeville's Travels*" in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, Eds. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 113-32; Andrew Fleck, "Here, there and in between: representing differences in the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville," *Studies in Philology* 97.4 (2000): 379-400; and Martin Camargo, "*The Book of John Mandeville* and the Geography of Identity" in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, Eds. Timothy S. Jones and David Sprunger (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University Press, 2002), pp. 71-88.

## CONCLUSION

The characters of Alexander and Mandeville were transformed from symbols of power and sophistication in the Welsh strict meter bardic tradition into warnings against the dangers of conquest and the excesses of travel by the late sixteenth century. The question remains why humanist translators and scribes chose to revive and refigure these medieval explorers during this time. I believe this phenomenon can be at least partially explained through examining the use of medieval literary tropes in early modern Welsh political contexts. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, although many Welshmen had initially supported the 1535 and 1542 Acts of Union, there was a growing disenchantment with the Tudor regime by the end of the century. Many Welsh histories at this time often included pleas to Tudor monarchs to remember their own Welsh heritage and behave justly to their kinsmen.<sup>83</sup> While many Welshmen were able to flourish individually under the Tudors, for some it certainly seemed that Welsh culture and political life was being encroached upon and eroded by English influence. The response of many Welsh intellectuals and poets was to reach back into an imagined medieval past that would confirm both the antiquity and the necessity of a Welsh nation. National, religious, and linguistic boundaries were consistently being negotiated throughout this period, and the medieval insular literary and historiographical traditions often served as a battleground for such debates. Among the late sixteenth-century humanists, *mirabilia* and medieval tales of wonder found particular popularity among literary men and women who wished to argue for the historical exceptionalism of the Welsh people and landscape.

At the same time, European expansion into the Americas produced a new era of travel literature that galvanized discussions regarding the morality of conquest and the humanity of the recently discovered peoples across the ocean. Some Welshmen, such as Wiliam Peilyn, reveled in Wales's role in the newly formed British Empire and took to the seas as members of the British

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<sup>83</sup> See the discussion of the complaints of John and Richard Prise in their introductions to *Historiae Brittanicae Defensio* as well as Gruffudd Hiraethog's petition to Henry VIII, discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

naval fleet, subjugating new lands for the Tudor crown. Other Welsh authors, however, saw much to criticize in the expansion of English hegemony, whether into Wales or the Americas.

Luminaries such as Humphrey Llwyd, David Powel, and Siôn Dafydd Rhys combined the medievalist discourse of the Tudor historiographical debates with their interest in tales from the New World to create a corpus of literature that aligned their homeland with the Americas and treated both as marvelous spaces at risk of occupation from oppressive foreign threats. This identification with the geographical and cultural Other can be seen most clearly in the promotion of the Madoc legend discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation: in the tales of the Madoc and the Indians, Welsh authors not only empathize with indigenous Americans as their biological kindred, they also relate a potent political fantasy in which a benevolent Welsh rule based in medieval tradition replaces Anglo-British empire. Welsh hegemony of the Americas, they argue, would not come by sword, but rather through the peaceful reunion of brothers. The Madoc legend is not alone in its desire to associate the Welsh with the marvelous and strange. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, sixteenth-century literature is replete with examples of Welsh appropriation of the exotic and wondrous that hearken back to medieval prose. Just as the humanists could imagine medieval Welsh colonization in the Americas, so too could they imagine their ancestors as Syrian giants or nobly savage cavemen whose language mirrored Hebrew.

It is in this context we should reconsider the renewed interest in the medieval travelers Alexander and Mandeville. The sixteenth century was a period of a massive overhaul of Welsh public life and a refining of the borders between England and Wales, a change that necessitated a reappraisal of literary stock characters. Even at the time of the composition of the earlier Alexander and Mandeville material, poetic comparisons of Welsh lords to either of these legendary men were unrealistic. Yet the Welsh remained a semi-autonomous people, and the Welsh ruling elite could imagine itself as a learned Mandeville or fantasize about the extent of Alexander's conquests. However, as time wore on and English dominance of the Welsh

landscape and political life became inescapable, this became less of a viable fantasy, and the previous Welsh use of Alexander and Mandeville became obsolete. The figures of both Alexander and Mandeville were reassessed and reconstructed so they questioned and criticized the notions of expansion from the perspective of the colonized, rather than praise them from perspective of the armchair colonizer.

## EPILOGUE

*Evans: Aberconway is very like Abercromy, a liddle hard s'ift has  
pyt 'em aull into Wales; but our desires and petitions is,  
that the musiques be all Welse, and the dances, and no  
'Ercules brought in now with a great staff, and a pudding  
upon him.*

*Jenkins: Aw! was his distaff, was not his club.*

*Evans: What need of 'Ercules, when Cadwallader—*

*Jenkins: Or Lluellin, or Rheese ap Gryffyth, or Cradock, or Owen  
Glendower, with a Welse hook and a goat-skin on his  
back, had done very better and twice as well?*<sup>1</sup>

On February 17, 1618, Ben Jonson staged a production of his farcical masque, *For the Honour of Wales*, written in honor of Charles Stuart, who had been invested with the title of Prince of Wales only two years earlier. The masque was a revision of Jonson's earlier work, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, which had debuted before the Stuart court in London only one month before.<sup>2</sup> *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* interprets the legend of Hercules's travels in Libya through the lens of the genre of the *speculum principum*: Jonson allegorizes the hero's battles with monsters such as pygmies and the personified Atlas Mountains as the internal struggles a prince must face as he reconciles his responsibilities with his desire for adventure. Although today one of Jonson's better known masques, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* was initially panned by its royal audience, who found the masque's moralizing instruction to the young Prince Charles too dry for its liking. In response to this criticism, Jonson revised the work, replacing its classical heroes with buffoonish and jingoistic Welshmen who comically instruct the prince on the lessons to be drawn from traditional Welsh history. In the above passage, they discuss the failures of Jonson's earlier masque and claim that its marvelous characters could easily be replaced with

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson, "For the Honour of Wales" in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, Ed. Barry Cornwall (London: Edward Moxon, 1837), 610-613. An online edition appears at The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson, <[http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/wales/facing/#ver\\_wales\\_ms](http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/wales/facing/#ver_wales_ms)>

<sup>2</sup> Very little has been written about *For the Honour of Wales* and its relationship to the more popular *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*. For a treatment of the masque, see Andrew Hiscock, "To the Honour of that Nation: Ben Jonson and the Masquing of Wales" in *Dangerous Diversity: The Changing Faces of Wales*, Eds. Katie Gramich and Andrew Hiscock (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 37-63.

famous Welsh heroes. They suggest substituting Hercules with a host of mythological and historical heroes whose deeds the prince would be better off learning. Elsewhere in the text, they compare Snowdonia favorably to the Atlas Mountains, proposing the former as a site of wonder equal to the African range: “Aw, Velhy! Why law you now, ‘is not Pen-maen-maur and Craig-Eriri as good sound as Adlas every whit of him?” The masque ends as the Welsh characters sing songs that praise Brutus, Arthur, and Prince Charles while they dance alongside performing goats and “the Pigmees of Wales.”

Jonson’s Welsh masque in many ways mirrors contemporaneous English plays such as *Cymbeline* and *Caradog*, in which Welsh characters serve as a comic foil for more noble Anglo-British characters. The coarseness of the Welsh characters and their incongruous self-importance contrast both the decorousness of court as well as the dignified subject matter of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*. Like Shakespeare and Armin before him, Jonson draws upon the stereotype of the querulous rustic Welshman as a source of humor and derision. He mocks these figures for their obsession with the heroic past and their desire to include their own landscape among the world’s greatest marvels. The masque demonstrates some affection towards Wales: the references to Welsh history and culture reflect some familiarity with the land and its people on Jonson’s part, as does his usage of the Welsh language.<sup>3</sup> Despite any perceived affinity Jonson might have expressed towards the Welsh, however, the text ultimately highlights the fundamental differences that exist between them and their insular neighbors. Although his Welsh characters ostensibly participate in the Stuart social milieu (Evans, for example, is an attorney), Jonson suggests that they belong to a different era. They are more comfortable frolicking at the foothills of monstrous mountains with pygmies than participating in their own governance. While the text ridicules these

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<sup>3</sup> Although Jonson’s characters speak English in a broad stage Welsh accent, the Welsh lines interspersed throughout the text are grammatically sound, especially when compared to other instances of Welsh that appeared on the English stage during this period. Melville and Richards have suggested that Jonson likely studied Welsh formally rather than picking up bits from Welsh colleagues. The peculiar orthography of Jonson’s Welsh indicates that he may have learned the language from Siôn Dafydd Rhys’s *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve Linguae Institutiones et Rudimenta*. See Melville and Richards, 46-47.



characters for their obsession with a legendary past, it also depicts them as distinct products of that past. In this work, the Welsh are historical curiosities, strange artifacts from an alternative history in which Wales is paramount among the disparate nations of Britain.

As I have shown in this dissertation, the belief in its cultural, linguistic, and topographical wonders influenced the depiction of Wales in insular literatures throughout the medieval and early modern periods. *For the Honour of Wales* derives its characterization of the Welsh not only from English literature that had long presented its western neighbors in exoticized and racialized terms, but also from an equally enduring Welsh tradition that stressed its connection to the marvelous and strange. These competing traditions often coalesced in Welsh literature that availed itself of orientalist rhetoric to highlight the native *mirabilia* of Britain. The authors of this literature tended to promote two specific types of wonders as particularly endemic to Britain: topographical curiosities and prehistoric giants. In the histories and romances of the medieval and early modern Welsh corpora, characters must navigate imposing mountains and magical bodies of water that blur the lines between the eastern lands of fantastic geographies, the world of the native heroic tradition, and the lived landscape of contemporary Wales. In this literature, giants are transformed from antagonists into heroic figures who function as narrative vehicles for the exploration of man's relationship to the vastness of nature and the weight of historical time.

The association of Wales with a race of prehistoric giants also influenced the portrayal of the Welsh during this period. Just as the landscape had been conceived as having been forged by the marvelous men and women of the heroic past, the Welsh people were often regarded as prehistoric relics in English and Welsh texts. While English texts often presented Welsh characters as rustic or brutish fools who represented an uncivilized and ignoble era of British history, Welsh authors depicted their ancestors as Noble Savages. In particular, these authors highlighted the antiquity of their language as proof of their dignified and ancient origins. They cast Wales as an Edenic space in which the language of Adam was spoken: for example, humanists and grammarians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries argued for

linguistic relationship between Welsh and Hebrew in order to fashion a syncretic history in which the origins of the Welsh could be traced to the marvelous and miraculous history of the Middle East. Similarly, several of these authors also promoted stories of Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd that claimed a genetic and linguistic relationship between the Welsh and the Aztecs of Mexico.

This impulse to trace the origins of the Welsh to the aboriginal peoples of Asia and the Americas dates back to the Middle Ages and clearly informs not only the versions of Madoc popular among the Tudor court, but also translations of medieval wonder-texts that found renewed popularity in the late sixteenth century. Influenced by both the rich tradition of Welsh *mirabilia* as well as contemporary accounts of American exploration, Welsh translators of the period approached international medieval travel narrative with a skeptical eye as they reinterpreted works such as *The Book of John Mandeville* and *The Alexandreis* in light of global colonization. These translations challenged previously held beliefs about the nature of travel and conquest and allowed their Welsh authors to consider their own position within an ever-expanding Anglo-British empire.

The intersectional rhetoric of exoticism, primitivism, and conquest infuses much of the literature of Wales from the late medieval and early modern periods: this dissertation only scratches the surface of the body of texts that deserve scholarly consideration. Several avenues for future research present themselves. For example, a fuller examination of the Middle Welsh translations of geographical texts such as *Fford y Brawd Odrig* or *Delw y Byd* could provide us with greater insight into the nature of the *mirabilia* that pervade native and imported texts. Similarly, a closer study of the transmission of Welsh and English texts across borders would allow for a better understanding of the ways in which their competing portrayals of Welsh wonder influenced each other. While this dissertation can only provide an overview of this rich and fascinating field of study, I hope that it provides a useful framework for further investigation into depictions of the wondrous in Welsh literature.

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